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Islam in the modern world

إِسْلَامٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

# Islam in the Modern World

1983 Paine Lectures in Religion

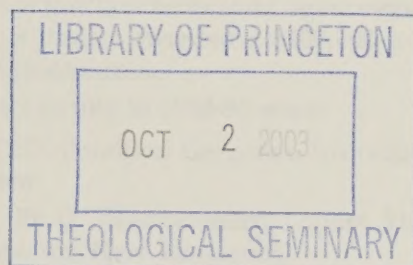
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The lecturers for the eighth series of the Paine Lectures in Religion, "Islam in the Modern World," were:

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# THE LAW OF REBELLION IN ISLAM

The title of this paper might at first sound strange to a reader because it might seem to indicate that there is in Islam a law of rebellion. But rebellion itself denotes a state of affairs where law and order have broken down. How, then, can there be a "law of rebellion?" The subject of this paper, however, actually deals with the law in Islam that prohibits rebellion under almost any conditions. My object is to trace the origin and development of this law. But at a lower level, one might even ask whether there is a law of social or political protest against the government in Islam. As we shall see later, there exists no such law formulated by the jurists, but there do exist certain maxims couched in the form of *ḥadīths* (putative traditions from the Prophet) which we shall attempt to analyze.

Islam itself, of course, was a rebellion against the *status quo* in 7th-century Arabia, a rebellion that started from Mecca and Medina and then spread throughout the Arabian peninsula and beyond. But after the Islamic movement gained power and generated governments, the lawyers of Islam, at an early state of the development of Islamic history, prohibited all uprisings against an established rule. Nevertheless, throughout Islamic history there have been rebellions in all parts of the Muslim world. And, of course, there have been internecine wars, and indeed there have been intra-Islamic *jihāds*. *Jihād* means struggle for "the Cause of Allah," i.e., Islam, including active fighting. Since Islamic law prohibits warring purely for territorial expansion, and the only kind of fighting it allows is *jihād*, whenever one Muslim power attacked another, it felt obliged to give reasons for the attack and thus justify it as *jihād*.

When we come to contemporary Islam, we find that there is among the younger generation of Muslims, particularly the educated ones, an unusual restiveness and clamor against the existing situation in practically all Muslim countries. This anti-attitude is both against the social *status quo* and against most Muslim governments. We have witnessed in recent years an upsurge of Islamic sentiment of which a major component is dissatisfaction with the current society and the desire to replace it with a better one insofar as that is possible.

Almost immediately after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632 C.E., several Arab tribes, who had become Muslim and come under Islamic rule, went back to their tribal sovereignty. The first Caliph or successor to Muḥammad, Abu Bakr, fought these tribes and brought them to acknowledge once again the central political authority at Medina. This phenomenon is very interesting insofar as it illustrates the confusion which resulted in the Islamic law of apostasy. This phenomenon is termed by the Muslim historians "Ridda," which means apostasy. Actually,



however, those tribes who had resumed their tribal sovereignty had not apostatized from Islam but were reasserting the sovereignty of tribes *vis-à-vis* the central authority of Medina by withholding the payment of the *Zabat*-tax to the government centered at Medina. What therefore really happened was that these people were rebelling against the central authority and were then brought back by force to acknowledge that authority. Otherwise these people had not become apostates because they insisted that they were Muslim, that they would pray, observe the last of the month of Ramadan and carry out all the duties enjoined by Islam, except that they would not pay the tax to Medina. From this confusion between the political and the religious, the lawyers of Islam deduced the law that a Muslim or a group who becomes a religious apostate has to be brought back to Islam and in case of refusal has to be subject to capital punishment. That this law is against the Qur'ān is obvious from such statements of the Qur'ān as the following: "Those people who believed then disbelieved, then again believed and once again disbelieved and then became entrenched in their disbelief, God shall not forgive them. . ." (4,137; cf. also 3,90). This shows that apostasy is not a punishable crime.

The lawyers, however, formulated their law against rebellion in prohibiting all such forms of uprising from quite another quarter. The first schism in Islam that arose about three decades after the Prophet's death is known as *khārijism*.<sup>1</sup> A *khārijī* means a rebel or a secessionist. A group of people who adopted this attitude and were called Khārijites asserted that a Muslim who commits a grave sin or error without repenting and without mending his or her conduct ceases to be a Muslim and becomes a *kāfir*—a rejecter of Islam—no matter how many times and how loudly he or she professes the confession of faith, namely "there is no God but Allah and Muḥammad is His Messenger." This schism had arisen originally from a political background. The third Caliph, 'Uthmān, was assassinated in 656 C.E. by certain rebels on the ground that he had mismanaged the government and indulged in nepotism. Those who became Khārijites a little later actually were heirs to this group of assassins. The Khārijites contended that 'Uthmān had been slain justifiably because he committed grave errors in public affairs and did not repent. They also called the fourth Caliph, 'Alī, a *kāfir* because he had submitted his claim to the Caliphate to arbitration after having been elected Caliph. 'Alī was assassinated by a Khārijite in 661. The Khārijites then pushed their stance to its logical conclusion and demanded from the Muslim community that both these Caliphs should be recognized as *kāfirs*. When the community at large refused to do so, the Khārijites then said that a person who does not acknowledge a *kāfir* as a *kāfir*, himself becomes a *kāfir*, and they declared that the entire Muslim community had become *kāfir*. They then took up

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<sup>1</sup>See the article "Khārijites" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition; see also my *Islam*, second edition, University of Chicago Press, chapter 10.



arms against the community. These rebellions by the Khārijites lasted for about a century.

As a reaction to this Khārijite stand and to their professional rebellionism there grew up a new opinion among certain theologians who held that a person who professes the confession of the faith, and there is no reason to believe that he or she is lying or insane or delirious, must be accepted as a Muslim and cannot be excommunicated. Whether or not his or her deeds are up to the standards of the Qur'ān and his or her beliefs are also entirely correct or not, will be judged by God himself on the Day of Judgement. It was not up to a human being to declare him or her a *kāfir*. This new attitude which also received the official support of the ruling dynasty of the Umayyads is known as *irjā'*. The term *irjā'* means "to postpone" and this point of view came to be called *irjā'* because its holders believed in the postponement of the decisive judgement upon a Muslim until the Day of Judgement. The school of thought that adopted this view is called *Murji'a*.<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of *irjā'* was eventually adopted by the entire Muslim community, both Sunni and Shī'a, because the stand of the Khārijites threatened the very existence of the community.

What this formula actually aims at achieving is that a person who sincerely declares himself to be a Muslim is a member of the Muslim community and cannot be thrown out of the community and excommunicated. In the final analysis, however, this attitude could not fail to affect the moral fiber of the community as well, because, when taken literally, it meant that a Muslim can remain a Muslim so long as he or she professes the confession of faith and that no one in this world can judge his real faith or conduct. That part of a person's conduct which constitutes crime is punishable, but punishment purifies a person and purges him or her of *sin*. In Islam, a person who has been duly punished for his or her crime, has been "cleansed" of his or her sin. But an apostate cannot be cleansed even by capital punishment because apostasy is not a sin but "kufr." As a result of this development, a good deal of *ḥadīths* came into being, allegedly emanating from the Prophet and justifying *irjā'*. There is a well-known *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, for example, which is contained in the standard works of *ḥadīth*, both Sunni and Shī'a, and which is as follows: the Prophet once said to one of his Companions, Abū dharr al-Ghifārī, "Whoever professes: 'there is no God but Allah and Muḥammad is His Messenger' goes to paradise." The companion said to the Prophet, "Even if he commits adultery or theft?" The Prophet answered in the affirmative. The companion is supposed to have reiterated this question three times and each time the Prophet supposedly answered affirmatively with ever

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<sup>2</sup>See the article "Murji'a" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first edition (the new edition has not yet reached the letter M); also my *Islamic Methodology in History*, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, 1965, chapter 2.

greater emphasis.<sup>3</sup> That this ḥadīth, although accepted by the community at large, is not only spurious but contradicts the basic stance of the Qur'ān is obvious. The Qur'ān, from the beginning to the end, always mentions faith and good works together and never creates any separation between the two. "Those who believe and do good works" is a standard phrase that occurs throughout the Qur'ān with unflinching regularity and needs no documentation. In fact, there are two verses in the Qur'ān which assured all those Muslims, Jews, Christians and Sabeans good rewards from God provided they believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds (2,62; 5,69). In these two verses even belief in the Messengership of the Prophet Muḥammad is not mentioned, so intent is the Qur'ān on emphasizing the importance of good deeds. But this ḥadīth precisely divorces good deeds from faith and makes salvation dependent upon faith alone. It is actually the Pauline doctrine of Justification by Faith masquerading in the name of Islam. It is true that in order to save the community, the enunciation of some such principle was absolutely necessary in face of the *Khārijī* stand. Nevertheless, to enunciate a formula like the one contained in this ḥadīth must affect the moral standards of the believers. The Qur'ān, of course, is full of statements that point out untiringly the unlimited mercy and forgiveness of God and that God forgives all sins except the sin of idolatry. But it never promised paradise to people who may with equanimity commit adultery and theft. This ḥadīth therefore goes far beyond anything that the Qur'ān has to say on the subject of God's forgiveness.

Let us now consider the political counterpart of this *irjā'*ist development, whose theological expression we have just seen. Political ḥadīths form a special genre of ḥadīth literature called *Ḥadīth al-Fitan* (ḥadīth about Civil Wars). The ḥadīth in question is as follows: "Hudhaifa ibn al-yamān, a Companion of the Prophet, reports that while other people used to ask God's Messenger (peace and blessings of God be upon him) about the good, I used to ask him about the evil out of fear, lest it should overtake me. I said to the Prophet 'we used to be in ignorance and in evil (i.e., before you) but then God brought us this good. After this good, will there be evil again?' The Prophet replied, 'Yes.' I said, 'After this evil, will there be good again?' He said 'Yes, but there will be a contamination in it.' I said, 'What will be its contamination?' He said, 'There will be a people or a group who shall follow a sunna (path) other than mine and they shall guide people with a guidance which is not mine. You will recognize some good in them and some evil as well.' I said, 'After that (mixed) good will there be evil again?' He said, 'Yes.' Then there shall be propagandists standing at the gates of hell; whosoever responds to them they shall throw him therein.' I said, 'O God's Messenger, describe them to us.' He said, 'They will be from our race and will speak our tongue (i.e., Arabic).' I said, 'what would you command me if such a situation should overtake me?' He said, 'You must stick to the majority of the Muslims and to its leader.' I

<sup>3</sup>See my *Islamic Methodology in History*, p. 60.



said, 'If they have no majority party nor a political leader?' He said, 'Then abandon all those groups and, if you have to, you must stick to the trunk of a tree until death overtakes you and you are in this condition.'"<sup>4</sup>

This ḥadīth exists both in the works of Muslim and Bukhārī, the two most authoritative works of Ḥadīth, compiled in the 9th century C.E. Another version recorded by Muslim: the Prophet said, "After me there shall be political leaders who will not be guided by my guidance nor shall they follow my sunna. And there shall rise among them men whose hearts shall be the hearts of the devil in the frame of human bodies." Hudhaifa then said, "What shall I do, O the Messenger of God, if I find myself in such a situation?" The Prophet replied, "You must listen and obey the political leader; even if he beats you on the back and confiscates your property, you must only listen and obey."<sup>5</sup>

According to another ḥadīth of the same genre, the Prophet said "There shall be Civil Wars where a sit-at-home will be better than a person who stands up, and a standing person will be better than the one who walks, and the walking person shall be better than the one who runs."<sup>6</sup> This ḥadīth is in the great ḥadīth work by Muslim.

It is obvious that this type of political ḥadīth, which is the political counterpart of the theological *irjā'*, was designed to calm down the heat of political activism and internecine wars of which the major phenomenon was Khārijism. Apart from this ḥadīth, certain verses of the Qur'ān were invoked by lawyers to back up the lawyers' prohibition of rebellion and political nonconformism. The following are the Qur'ānic verses invoked: "Obey God and obey His Messenger and those who are in authority over you from amongst yourselves" (4,59). Incidentally, this verse was used during the days of Western colonialism in Muslim lands to justify disobedience against foreign rulers because the Qur'ān talks about obedience to rulers from "amongst yourselves." Qur'ān 9,107 is also quoted in this connection which speaks of: "Those people who have adopted a mosque in order to injure (the Muslim community) and as an act of infidelity and in order to divide the Faithful . . ." This refers to an incident in which a group of Muslims quarreled with others and set up a separate mosque in Medina. This mosque was condemned by the Qur'ān as an evil because it helped sow dissension within the Muslim community. Again, Qur'ān 49,9 is also quoted in this connection. This verse says, "If two groups of Muslims fight against each other, bring peace among them; but if one of the parties should 'transgress against the other,' then fight that group that is rebelling until it submits to the command of God (i.e., accepts peace with the other group). If it so returns, then make peace between them in justice

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 57.



and you must be fair; God loves those who are fair." This verse, of course, does not refer to rebellion against an established state but refers to in-fighting among the community. It could be applied, for example, to the Iraqi-Irani war where two Muslim powers are fighting. Finally, there is the verse that is most quoted in this connection by the legal authorities, namely 5,33: "The punishment of those who fight against God and His Messenger and are busy sowing corruption on the earth is that they shall be killed or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off from the opposite sides or they shall be exiled from the land."

This is the most commonly invoked verse in connection with the prohibition of rebellion. However, the context within which this verse was revealed does not have anything to do with rebellion but with a group of people who became highway robbers and who instilled a good deal of terror among the people. We know that there was, in fact, no rebellion against the Prophet during his lifetime, so the verse cannot refer to any rebellion. It does refer to a willful breaking down of law and order so that violence and harm were done to peaceful citizens; in fact, the lawyers also say that this is the punishment for highway robbers. It follows, therefore, that the Qur'an has nothing to say on the subject of political rebellion one way or the other, even though it is adamant that the unity and solidarity of the community must not be disrupted. And it describes the Muslim community by saying that they are "like a building reenforced with lead" (61,4).

The root of the problem lies in the fact that the Muslims never formulated any satisfactory political theory on the basis of the Qur'an. As for the Sunnis, for the most part they simply rationalized the actual situation. While the Khārijites, for example, insisted that any virtuous person from any race or color or, indeed, either sex, can become rulers, provided he or she is capable and virtuous, and the Shī'a insisted on legitimism, i.e., the doctrine that Muslims must be ruled by a person descended from the household of 'Alī and Fātima, the Prophet's daughter, the Sunnis acted upon a ḥadīth according to which the Prophet said that the rulers of Muslims must be from the Quraish, i.e., the Prophet's tribe. Now, since the actual rulers (Caliphs) were from the tribe of Quraish, the Sunni position is little more than the rationalization of the actual state of affairs. The Shī'a doctrine, formulated during the 8th and 9th centuries, particularly the 9th century C.E. and elaborated later, is actually derived from the pre-Islamic, Iranian notion of kingship. The king in pre-Islamic Iran was regarded as divine and, irrespective of his qualifications, once he became king, it was believed that he was "God's shadow" on earth. To this Iranian idea of the divine king, the Shī'a seem to have added certain gnostic elements, for example, the idea that the *imām*—the supreme infallible religio-political ruler—must be omniscient comes from the gnostic stock of ideas, not from the old Iranian ideas. So the Sunnis, although in theory they held to the view that the Caliph has to be elected by the community, nevertheless did not elaborate any theory of how he is

to be elected or who is to elect him. The common view among the Sunni theoreticians is that he may be elected by one person and then the rest of the community must follow suit in swearing its allegiance (*bai'a*) to him. *Bai'a*, which literally means "to sell," as a religio-political technical term in Islam means the oath of obedience to an authority, particularly to the Caliph. But while in theory they insisted on the principle of election, they nevertheless came to believe, in the course of time, that a person who actually seizes power and uses it effectively is legitimate in the eyes of Islam. In fact, the seizure of power on the part of a strong person, say a military commander, is *ipso facto*, the proof of his legitimacy. It is for this reason, namely that the Muslims were unable to elaborate any satisfactory theory of government and rule, that we find today throughout the Muslim world, from Morocco on the shores of the Atlantic to Indonesia in the Pacific, strong-men rulers, be they kings, military dictators or religious autocrats.

But if the Muslims had really looked into the Qur'ān, the solution was there. The solution that the Qur'ān gives to this problem is *shūrā*, which means *deciding affairs through mutual consultation and discussion*. In 42,38, the Qur'ān, while describing the characteristics of the faithful, says, among other things, "and they decide their affairs through *Shūrā*." *Shūrā* was a pre-Islamic Arab principle for deciding affairs. The chief of a tribe had no power in pre-Islamic Arabia to make momentous decisions on his own. These decisions were taken collectively by a council of elders wherein each member of the council represented a clan. This representation was, of course, not through elections, but was a natural phenomenon; everyone in the tribe knew who was the natural representative of such and such a clan. Problems of whether to fight an enemy or to make peace or to establish other vital relationships with other tribes or to decide murder cases, all these decisions were made through the process of *shūrā*. The Qur'ān confirms this in the verse quoted above. In 3,159, the Qur'ān also tells the Prophet that he must consult the Muslim community before making important decisions. This particular verse is connected with the Battle of Uḥud (624 C.E.) between the Muslims and the Meccans who had invaded Medina, the capital of Islam. There was a difference of opinion between the Prophet and the majority of his followers as to where they should give battle to the invading Meccans. The Prophet was of the opinion that the Meccans should be allowed to come inside the town and there be engaged in battle, but the majority of his companions were of the view that the Meccans should be met outside Medina near the Uḥud hills. The latter strategy was actually chosen. As it turned out, the Muslims suffered a reverse in that battle; nevertheless, the Qur'ān, while criticizing some Muslims for their mismanagement of the battle, still insisted that the Prophet must consult them before making decisions.

Verse 3,159, because of the fact that the Prophet Muḥammad had a special irreplaceable position in and for the community, cannot, on its own, be deduced as a proof for the *shūrā* procedure. But the other verse,

42,38, is a clear command to the Muslims to adopt *shūrā* as their decision-making procedure.

In Islamic history, however, very early on, the whole concept of *shūrā*<sup>7</sup> was distorted and instead of being taken as a principle by which the community itself makes decisions through mutual discussion and consultation, *shūrā* in historic Islam came to mean that a head of state, be he a Caliph or a sultan (king) or amir (governor) should consult such persons as he thinks are repositories of wisdom in order to decide important affairs. Let us harken once again to the words of the Qur'ān which say *shūrā bainahum*, which means *mutual* consultation and discussion, *not* consultation by the head of the state with whomever he chooses to consult. This distortion has so infected all subsequent practice of *shūrā* that Muslims now seem unable to go back to the original concept of the Qur'ān. We see, for example, that Ayatollah Khomeini or General Ziaul Haq contend that since the average Muslim, the common member of the community, is unable to see right from wrong, decisions must be imposed on him from the top by the head of the state after consulting some people. It is obvious that *shūrā* is a democratic process because its base is the community. In the contemporary situation the only effective form of *shūrā* is the institution of a representative form of government where the elected representatives shall conduct the affairs of the state. There are two fatal objections to the concept of strong-man rule currently dominant throughout the Muslim world.

First, if the average Muslim cannot distinguish right from wrong, how can the head of the state, a single person no matter how wise he be, be relied upon to do so? Secondly, and most importantly, if the average Muslim is held to be devoid of the necessary insight to distinguish right from wrong, then we must frankly admit that the Muslim community is not in existence. This is because the Qur'ān puts the duty and privilege of decision-making tasks on the shoulders of the community and not on any elite or strong-man.

Khomeini's contention, for example, in his well-known work "*Islamic Government*" (*vilāyat-i faqīh*), that it is the religious leadership in Islam that must rule, flies directly in the face of the Qur'ān, for the Qur'ān nowhere says it is the duty and privilege of religious leadership to rule. In fact, in 9,122, where the Qur'ān talks about those who have insight into the faith and are experts in religion, it says that those people who know religion well and understand it adequately must teach others so that the gap between those who know the imperatives of Islam and the average Muslim must be minimized and the members of the community become equal in the art of running the Islamic state. The religious leadership in Islamic

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<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of *Shūrā*, see my article "The Principle of *Shūrā* and the Role of the Umma in Islam" in *The American Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1984, P. O. Box 38, Plainfield, Indiana 46168.



history has failed to carry out this task; whether it was the failure of governments or of the religious leadership itself, we need not decide.

The irony is that all the significant Muslim thinkers for the last 100 years have insisted that Islam is not a theocracy because it does not possess a priestly class. This was the Muslim thinkers' answer to criticisms by Western writers that Islam is a theocracy. But now Ayatollah Khomeini is saying precisely this, that Islam does possess a clerical or priestly class and that it is the privilege of this class alone to rule. When, therefore, we look at the teaching of the Qur'ān and contemplate its principle of *shūrā*, it emerges undeniably that there is room in Islam only for *shūrā*, i.e., for equal participation by members of the community in running the affairs of the community and the Islamic state. There is no room there for a king, for a dictator, for a general or for an Ayatollah.

The current political situation in the Muslim world is, in fact, a direct reversal of whatever ground was gained in the political field during the past 100 years or so. The Muslim reformist thinkers of the past 100 years had insisted that whereas the Qur'ān had given Muslims systematically clear guidelines in all the fields of human endeavor, including the political, the Muslims themselves had distorted the teaching of the Qur'ān and abandoned it in favor of the cultural temper that had come to settle on Islam through the subsequent interpenetration of various cultural influences. In the political field, they contended that the Qur'ān had clearly given the principle of *shūrā* to the Muslim community but Muslims let themselves go adrift in the hands of historical forces, rather than controlling and directing those forces. Instead of developing a community-of-Islam consciousness, they allowed themselves to be ruled by autocrats. Indeed, in light of this account, it may be questioned in what sense the Caliphal institution was truly a Qur'ānic institution. The Qur'ān speaks of no Caliphate; wherever the term *Khalīfa* (Caliph) occurs in the Qur'ān in singular or plural, it seems to have no political connotation. The Qur'ān, indeed, calls all of humanity vicegerents (*khalīfas*) of God on earth (6,165; 10,14 and 73; 35,39).

The Muslim modernist, therefore, advocated and, whenever possible, agitated for constitutional forms of representative governments, and in many countries they succeeded. But then there came a severe reaction against this modernism on the part of the neo-fundamentalists who in several countries are currently very powerful, although there is little doubt that this neo-fundamentalism is a transition to something else. What this something else will be we do not know yet, but it is clear that if Muslim countries and Muslim societies are to survive as Muslim countries or as Muslim societies, then they must be educated afresh into the Islamic imperatives in all the fields of human endeavor, including the political. This reversal of Islamic modernism has occurred not only in the political field but in social fields as well. For example, the modernist contended that the Qur'ān had given rights to women and had recognized women as full persons in religious, economic and social terms, and there is abundant

evidence in the Qur'ān for this. However, the current upsurge of neo-fundamentalism is trying its very best to submerge whatever the Muslim modernist had gained by way of social reform and women's rights.

While it is correct that Muslims cannot regard Western moral, social and particularly sex ethics as normative and to be adopted blindly, nevertheless, a blind reaction and retrogression towards medievalism is equally unwise and anti-Qur'ānic.

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# **The Fundamentalist Response to Islam's Decline: A View from the Asian Periphery**

## **Overview**

This paper will explore the reformulation of faith in fringe but significant elements of the Muslim community alternatively labeled "militant," "extremist" or "fundamentalist." It will touch upon five vectors, definitionally discrete yet experientially convergent, the cumulative force of which sets the stage for any holistic assessment of Islamic fundamentalism:

- 1) the radical disjuncture between the Western/American experience of religion and that of the worldwide Muslim community;
- 2) the ambivalent relationship between the Muslim community as a social entity, with numerous, contrasting parts, and Islam as a single scriptural/doctrinal/ritual system;
- 3) the profusion of cultural attitudes throughout the vast reaches of the Muslim world, compelling consideration of factors both evident and discrete in any attempt to understand the interrelationship of component parts within the Muslim community. Two recurrently critical factors are:

a) the evident geographical distance between Southeast Asia and West Asia, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey as well as the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula and North African countries. Though only the last three are usually labeled "Arab," the distance between them and their non-Arab, West Asian neighbors appears short in comparison to their collective distance from Southeast Asia.

b) the discrete psychological distance between the historical perceptions of Southeast Asian Muslims and their West Asian coreligionists.

Each of the above vectors crystallized before World War II, though they were scarcely deemed important, either by the few Western scholars concerned with contemporary Islam or by Muslim elites projecting a panoramic view of their own community. Since then two new vectors have emerged, intensifying the tensions of the previous three vectors and



producing a sustained, durative impact on the non-Muslim as well as the Muslim world:

- 4) the attainment of a nation-state polity, in varied forms, throughout the Muslim world, often after continuous, severe political-military opposition to European colonial rule;
- 5) the dichotomous response of traditionalist and fundamentalist Muslims to the challenge of the post-colonial West, its institutions, its ideologies, its representatives. The traditionalist response has been to equate modern Western technology and materialist-secularist culture, rejecting both as overlapping, mutually reinforcing negative forces, capable only of damaging or, in time, destroying Islamic society. From a traditionalist perspective, no technology is possible without secularist incursions into the fabric of Muslim public and private, corporate and individual, life. Both are bad; both are to be avoided. The fundamentalist response seems related but, in fact, is opposite: secularism and materialism, the putative core of Western values, are also decried as the modern Satan, unmitigated evil. Yet technological development is deemed possible *without* attendant secularism; indeed, it is upheld as necessary, since the primary value of technology is instrumental, to equip Muslims to repel the new wave of post-independence colonialism, a more redoubtable foe than the previous territorial colonialism. The former, unlike the latter, hides behind the mask of "freedom," "human rights," etc., to conduct a modern religious crusade of Christians and Jews against Muslims, so insidious that it even beguiles and entraps power-crazed, unreflective Muslim elites (read: current governments) to act as its surrogates.

The fifth vector will be the main concern of this paper, yet it presupposes, even as it culminates, tendencies present in the other four. Ideally we should examine the entire Muslim world, but to heighten the variant perspective advocated from the Asian periphery, we will devote most of our attention to the furthest periphery, namely, the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia and Malaysia, and for purposes of contrast and comparison, we will look briefly at Pakistan, and even more briefly at Egypt and Iran.

## Introduction

Despite the constant attention to Islamic resurgence since the early 1970s and to Islamic fundamentalism since the ascent to power of the Ayatollah Khomeini in early 1979, there has been remarkably little analysis of what either resurgence or fundamentalism means in Islamic terms. Both resurgence and fundamentalism have appeared as catchall phrases used by Western media artists to capture the attention of a Western audience. Confusion abounds about what is talked about as fundamentalism. One approach, followed by some arcane journalists and serious but etymologi-

cally naive scholars, is to deny that it exists at all.<sup>1</sup> Since the term cannot be found in Arabic or any other Islamicly relevant language, it cannot be used to describe what is going on at one level in today's Muslim societies.

The opposite approach is favored by many observers: to suggest that fundamentalism exists everywhere, that once one has located a mindset, a group, a movement that proclaims and acts on the basis of Islamic values, it can be described as militant or extremist or fundamentalist; the choice of terms is less relevant than the disposition connoted.<sup>2</sup> Yet fundamentalism is too serious a phenomenon to be either dismissed or diffused. It is a radical, action-oriented ideology, anti-Western but not anti-modern, nostalgic but not traditional. It deserves to be studied; it must be understood before it is opposed or its challenge mitigated.

Confusion is compounded by a greater, still more pervasive misunderstanding. In looking to Islam, many people, not just Westerners, certainly not just Americans, or that peculiar breed of scholars denounced these days as Orientalists, (many people) understand Islam to be synonymous

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam* (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 249, dismisses fundamentalism by universalizing its scope. Yvonne Haddad attempts to pose a substitute concept, "neo-normative," because she fears the overtones of fanaticism and transience that "fundamentalism" connotes to Western readers ["The Islamic Alternative," *The Link* 15/4 (September/October 1982)], pp. 1-14. Although extensive scholarship informs her *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1982), her dismissal of fundamentalism echoes the argument, advanced by some Jewish apologists, that Judaism, i.e., Hebrew, possesses no word equivalent to "religion" and therefore it cannot be called a "religion"! The answer to this objection has been evocatively phrased by Zwi Werblowsky: "the Hebrew language, like Hebrew and Jewish culture, has not only a Biblical dictionary; it also has a history" [*Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1976)], p. 55 fn. The same could be and should be said of Arabic in relation to Islamic culture: the horizons of historical development stretch beyond the definitional reach of even the densest dictionary.

<sup>2</sup>There are so many unconscious practitioners of this approach that it would require an index of all the Middle East correspondents for American, British and European newspapers to detail them. Among nonjournalists the blanket approach is readily evident in the scholarship of: Fouad Ajami [*The Arab Predicament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981)], and numerous articles including "In the Pharaoh's Shadow: Religion and Authority in Egypt," in J. Piscatori, ed., *Islam in the Political Process* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 12-35; Michael M. J. Fischer, "Islam and the Revolt of the Petit (sic) Bourgeoisie" [*Daedalus* III/1 (Winter 1982)], pp. 101-126; and Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), especially pp. 83-110. All these authors and their cited works have been discussed at length in my article, "Muslim Fundamentalist Movements: Reflections Toward a New Approach," forthcoming in Barbara Stowasser, ed., *New Perspectives on Islam and Politics in the Middle East* (Westview Press, 1984).

with the Muslim world, and *vice versa*.<sup>3</sup> The equation is so facile that only an analogy from our own cultural context may help to uproot it. Imagine someone setting out to understand how Christianity worked by looking at all the diverse expressions of Christian ritual observance, Christian political allegiance, and Christian social stratification as derivative from a holistic system known as the Christian faith. No serious scholar of Christianity would attempt that kind of definitional reductionism, paralleling scriptural or creedal ideals with contingent historical realities. Yet in the case of Islam, we often assume, as W. Bijlefeld once hinted,<sup>4</sup> that Islam and the Muslim world are not only cross-hatched but interchangeable; in other words, to speak of Islam as a doctrinal unity is at the same time to presume that the Muslim world exists as a cultural unity.

The absurdity of conflating a world view with its historical expression becomes evident when we consider the distance between the Islamic assertion of universal brotherhood within the community of believers (the *ummah*) and the existence of more than 30 major Muslim nation-states worldwide, in addition to 10 Muslim minority communities within non-Muslim nation-states. (Few people would recognize Sicily, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia as place-names for minority Muslim communities, but others have achieved increased visibility for a variety of reasons: India, China, the USSR, the Philippines, and, of course, North

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<sup>3</sup>The current debate about civil religion epitomizes the conceptual lag between American attitudes toward creedal/ritual loyalty and those shared by most Muslims in most parts of *dar al-Islam*. R. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" was published over 15 years ago (*Daedalus*, Winter 1967, pp. 1-21). It has continued to evoke interest, spark controversy and generate further definitional efforts at sequestering the trans-sectarian character of American religion [though, arguably, Bellah himself is indebted to the discussion of an American overlay to all religious affiliations initiated by Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1955)]. The entire discussion would be incomprehensible to almost every Muslim, even those educated in the West, at multiple levels. The most essential, however, is also the most basic: the institutional separation of Church and State as a *positive* value. No less dumbfounding would be the emotive redefinition of the State as Church, presupposed by many advocates of civil religion. Even "secular" Turkey has not approached that stage of development, yet it is the hallmark legacy, the presumptive benefit of American religious pluralism, that no religious affiliation, or profession of the American way of life as one's "religion," is acceptable.

<sup>4</sup>W. Bijlefeld, "Observations on Contemporary Islam" in P. H. Stoddard *et al.*, eds., *Change and the Muslim World* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981), pp. 169-171. Bijlefeld makes an historical point, namely, that "until the late 1950s academics focused on Islam as distinct from the Muslim world, i.e., on Islam as a monolithic system" (p. 169). Yet he goes on to make the reverse point: that "we must begin to distinguish far more clearly than we have in the past between what is Islamic and what is Muslim" (p. 170). This latter distinction, of course, rivets the attention of Muslim activists or fundamentalists as well as Western social scientists: how can the ascriptive identity "Muslim" be disassociated from the achieved status "Islamic"? For the investigation of Southeast Asia we prefer to locate the core relationship between cultural identity and Islamic markings, without prejudging the truth or falsehood of those who, for a variety of motives, claim to be Muslim.



America, Canada as well as the United States).<sup>5</sup> Yet if we project doctrine into history, we might expect to find a Muslim world stamped consistently, if narrowly, by Arab identity. Most Americans, like most Europeans and also like most Japanese and Koreans, do, in fact, accept a three-tiered Arab gloss on the worldwide Muslim community: (1) that the heart of the Muslim world is the Arab world, (2) that most Muslims are Arabs or, at least, that true Muslims are Arabs and (3) that others who are non-Arabs are facsimile versions of Arab Muslims who would become Arab if they but had the good fortune and opportunity to make that upwardly mobile leap. Each of these "facts" is less than factual; each represents a twisted perception of the actual Muslim world and its inhabitants. Taken together, these misperceptions make an accurate estimate of that Muslim world problematic, if not impossible. Each merits refutation.

The first has neither scriptural nor empirical validity. A dispensation to Arabs, Islam is available to all mankind. Far from eschewing diversity, Islam welcomes it. While all Muslims pray with heads bowed toward Mecca, and while the paramount scriptural authority of Islam, the Qur'ān, continues almost 1400 years after the lifetime of its prophetic mediator, Muḥammad, to be expressed in Arabic alone (no translations being accepted as equivalent to the original Arabic), there remains in Islamic ideals no superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs. Both are intended to share equally in what was presented as the last and the greatest of the divine revelations to all mankind. It was the Prophet himself who said in his farewell sermon to his closest, mostly Arab, followers: "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor has a non-Arab superiority over an Arab."

The multivalency of Islam's appeal could be further underscored by reference to the historical legacy: non-Arabs have contributed as often and as much as Arabs to the glory of Islamic civilization.<sup>6</sup> But the more

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<sup>5</sup>There is very little accurate information on the status of Muslim minority communities, despite their numbers and claim to influence throughout *dar al-Islam*. Among the recent publications devoted exclusively to this neglected group is the *Journal of the Institute of Minority Affairs*, edited by Syed Z. Abedin and published, since Summer 1979, by King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Concerning the Muslim community in Canada as well as the United States, see now Earle H. Waugh, et al., eds., *The Muslim Community in North America* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup>It seems gratuitous to footnote this evident achievement—except that it has been subtly and overtly down-played in much of the recent literature about Arab nationalism. See, for example, the selection from the Syrian patriot, Sati<sup>c</sup> al-Husri in Sylvia G. Haim, ed., *Arab Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 147-153; and also, the failure to acknowledge Persian contributors to Arab cultural attainments, in Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 3-4. The major critical work detailing the full splendor of Arab and non-Arab actors in the long span of Islamic(ate) civilization is, and will remain for some time, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

immediate and compelling argument is numerical. If one pays attention to demography as well as geography, the largest number of Muslims in the world live outside Arabia or the Fertile Crescent or North Africa. By any of the four definitions that might be proposed for Arab,<sup>7</sup> most Muslims are non-Arabs. They are Asians. The single largest concentration of Muslims is to be found in South Asia, with Bangladesh surpassing Pakistan as the most populous Muslim nation of the Asian subcontinent. India adds another 80 million to their combined total. But it is in Southeast Asia that one finds the largest Muslim country in the world; Indonesia numbers more than 120 million Muslims among its 160 million citizens.

It is the debate about what constitutes true Islam that skews all the above demographic markings of the Muslim community. Despite much publicity to the contrary, there is no orthodoxy in Islam by which one can measure true Muslims from false Muslims. The suggestion that there is instead of orthodoxy, orthopraxis, i.e., conformity of action if not belief, complicates rather than clarifies the issue. While Mecca is the point of ritual allegiance, and while the canonical pilgrimage is enjoined on all male Muslims (and all female Muslims with the requisite *mahram*, i.e., approved male guardian, whether husband, father or brother) once during a lifetime, if health and finances permit, there exist a variety of cultural expressions to Islamic loyalty. Many of them are non-Arab, even to the point of minimizing—without, however, outrightly rejecting—the *hajj* requirements. All of them are self-validating, since there is no central ecclesiastical structure, such as the Roman Church or the Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, Methodist, and Lutheran episcopacies, all of which can and do regulate patterns of belief and ritual compliance consistent with the prescribed norm of their institution. Such is the degree of autonomy for each of the regions comprising the Muslim world that Peter Brown, the Berkeley classicist now accepted as a generalist authority on Islam, once extolled the unique capacity of *dar al-Islam* (the worldwide Muslim community) to “decolonize” itself,<sup>8</sup> by which he meant not that Muslims experienced a pre-European form of colonialism at the hands of Arabs but rather that they came to identify themselves as Muslim without hierarchical or binding loyalty to any predetermined, external center. . . long before the coming of Europeans and the beginning of the colonial, which was also the early modern, period for most Muslim regions of Africa and Asia.

The demarcation of Arab from non-Arab Muslims became intensified by the disruptions of modern history, especially the 20th century. It is the wrenching transition from colonialism to nationalism to post-independence statehood that has determined the profile of all Muslim commu-

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<sup>7</sup>See Hodgson, *op. cit.*, volume 1, pp. 62-63.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Brown, “Understanding Islam,” *New York Review of Books*, 22 February 1979, p. 32.

nities in ways that are as decisive as the creedal enunciations of the Qur'an and Islamic law. Yet the most recent era of Islam is seldom understood or analyzed as having commensurate weight with Islam's formative period. The reason is not hard to find. Most Western observers—certainly the journalists and political scientists who rely on their dispatches, and Department of Defense analysts eager to grasp the “quick and dirty”—accept unquestioningly what one historian has characterized as the Islamic *mythomoteur*, that is, the compelling, driving force of the Arab Muslim world view.<sup>9</sup> What is this uniquely Islamic *mythomoteur*? That Islam once enjoyed a near-total unity under a joint religio-political institution known as the Caliphate. The disposition is to look back to a golden age, 7th-century A.D. Arabia (which also marks the first century in the *hijri* calendar). Its centerpiece is the Medinan state, the reclamation of which preoccupies the thinking of many present-day Islamic scholars of the Sunni fold.<sup>10</sup> Of the complexities which this nostalgic fixation raises, two

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<sup>9</sup>The term is frequently used by John A. Armstrong in his ambitious and densely argued monograph, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). For Armstrong, *mythomoteur* is “the constitutive myth of a polity” (p. xii). He relates it to the internal dynamics of Islam, especially the persistent effect of nostalgia. He demonstrates how a variety of Muslim dynasts projected “the image of [Islam as] a universal religion clothed in the forms of imperial domination,” while at the same time politics in Islam remained “pure nostalgia for the primitive (i.e., nomadic) period plus a mobilizing force for defense” [p. 136; itself a citation from the Tunisian political historian, Hichem Djait, *L'Europe et l'Islam* (Paris: 1978), p. 129]. The inhibitory effect of the regnant Islamic *mythomoteur* on the formation of imperial polities is evident: since “genealogical myths with their [nostalgic overlay of] nomadic associations remain the most significant foci of identity,” “no design produced by an Islamic polity provided an organization sufficiently unified to elaborate and diffuse a single myth of ethnic identity, much less to introduce one” (p. 188).

While the historical argument adduced by Armstrong may be overly structuralist, he at least avoids the animadversion of others who pursue a similar line of analysis [notably P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)]. And his emphasis on a distinctly Islamic *mythomoteur* has relevance for the post-independence as well as the prenatal period of Islamic history insofar as “it is the symbolic rather than the material aspects of common fate that are decisive for identity” (p. 9).

<sup>10</sup>The most notable exponent of this systemic regeneration of the Medinan State model is Ziauddin Sardar, a journeyman journalist from India now employed as information consultant at the Hajj Research Centre, King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah. His scheme for “Project 'Umran,” outlined in Chapter 5 of *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (London: 1979), echoes back to the Medinan State in a tumble of theories, models, paradigms and methodologies that are as confusing as they are abstract. A more cogent exposition of the difficulties inherent in projecting the 7th century A.D. (1st century A.H.) Medinan state as a prototype for the 20th century A.D. (15th century A.H.) Islamic state is to be found in the monograph of another Indian journeyman journalist, albeit of Bohra extraction: A. A. Engineer, *The Islamic State* (New Delhi: 1980). Though his writing style is muddled and his scholarship derivative, the conclusion (pp. 199-207) remains of interest.



are relevant here. On the one hand, it disregards the variant experience of Shi'i Muslims for whom the point of orientation to an ideal past is not the Caliphate but the Imamate. On the other hand, even more importantly, it fails to recognize the extent to which all idealizations of the past isolate and elaborate elements of Arab-Persian history in which the peoples of Asia, those who are the most numerous participants in the present-day Muslim community, have almost no stake. Far from identifying with an historical past which is Arab or Iranian, Asian Muslims are drawn to elements of their own cultural, ethnic, linguistic background, which for them are no less an adornment on the beauty of Islam than an idyllic past they never knew.

It is extremely important, therefore, at the outset of any discussion on Islamic fundamentalism to recognize the need to deconstruct, not just our Western analytical biases (which Marxists *manqués* now in fashion as literary critics claim to locate at the base of all intellectual endeavor), but also the penchant of Nile-to-Oxus Muslims to shape the content of what they perceive as true Islam, not only for themselves but also for all those who claim to be Muslims. There may be a sense in which, to revert Peter Brown's phrase, Muslims are in constant danger of recolonizing themselves, riveting their vision narrowly to their own past, alienating themselves not only from the contemporary world and its challenges but also from other Muslims with whom they share many concerns, sentiments, allegiances.<sup>11</sup>

## Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia

To understand Islamic fundamentalism as a reality affecting the Muslim world very differently in its different parts, we need to begin our analysis at a point where most other analyses end, if they ever reach that far. Indonesia is the largest modern-day Muslim nation. During many travels

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<sup>11</sup>The damages deriving from nostalgia for an Arab nomadic past are detailed by Abdallah Laroui, *op. cit.*, *passim*. He excoriates the *salafiyah* for prolonging what he sees as the cardinal problem of the Arabs, *their historical retardation*, by "lapsing into the psychology of heroes of the past" (p. 155). The only realistic hope for the future, he maintains, is "to put an end to the traditionalist mentality" (p. 176).

Alienation from non-Arab Muslims is a more subtle, persistent problem that derives from, and relates to, the powerful canonical valency of the Arabic language. It causes Arab Muslims to feel a kinship even with non-Muslim Arabs, to the exclusion of deep appreciation for non-Arab Muslims. Enlightened Saudis, such as Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef, Rector of King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, are aware of the language barrier within *dar al-Islam*, but so far have been powerless to change even the *status quo* of foreign language instruction (beyond English) at the university level. Acute perceptions of the problem, with multiple recommendations, still unimplemented, are set forth in S. S. Husain and S. A. Ashraf, eds., *Crisis in Muslim Education* (Jeddah: 1979), Chapter 7: The Language Problem, pp. 114-129.

to the Middle East, most of the people I have met and the audiences I have addressed are scarcely aware of the population of Indonesia. In response to direct, insistent questioning, guesses range from 20 million to 50 million. Usually the answer is followed by a comparison with Malaysia. Malaysia, one is told, may be larger than Indonesia, at least with respect to its Muslim population. In fact, Malaysia's population totals a mere 12½ million; a bare 50%, and maybe 49%, of them are Muslim. That makes the Muslim population of Malaysia larger than that of Saudi Arabia, but scarcely comparable to the 120 million who reckon themselves as Muslim in Indonesia. The dismissory view of Arab Muslims toward the largest Muslim nation is mirrored by most Westerners, including Americans. Since they/we minimize Indonesia's strategic importance, and therefore the significance of its Muslim inhabitants, we can see why, in nearly all of the books that have flooded the market since 1979 speaking of Islamic fundamentalism, attention given Indonesia is always peripheral. If and when Indonesia is tacked on, it is back-seated to the really important Muslim states, such as Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Pakistan.<sup>12</sup>

Yet there is value in looking at the Muslim world from Indonesia, especially if one hopes to grasp the *mythomoteur*, the driving force, of the Nile-to-Oxus Islamic world view. To begin consideration of Islamic fundamentalism by examining Indonesian evidence is to raise the prior question: what characterizes Indonesia as an Islamic land? It is first an island Islam, not a boundaried subcontinent such as South Asia, or a contiguous, often mountainous land mass, such as Central Asia, or a desert region such as the Arabian Peninsula, or a riverine society, such as Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Iraq, Jordan and Pakistan. Indonesia is a series of discrete islands, which are only loosely bound to one another by common culture or shared history. Even the national language is an artificial amalgam of local dialects, standardized and promulgated as "national" only in recent decades. The dominant island is Java: combined with the tiny, adjacent island of Madura, the more than 90 million inhabitants of Java-Madura occupy but 7% of Indonesia's total land mass. Yet politically and economically Java-Madura determines the tone of Indonesia to such an extent that a foreigner visiting Jakarta, the Javanese capital of Indonesia, may mistakenly assume, as did the itinerant West Indian novelist, V. S. Naipaul, while

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<sup>12</sup>Edward Mortimer, *op. cit.*, for example, admits that his "original synopsis contained an additional chapter entitled 'The Outer Circle: A Briefer Survey of Islam's Spreading Influence in the Far East (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines) and Black Africa.'" Never having been to Southeast Asia, he felt that he knew too little to write about it. Yet he makes bold to "offer a book that at least attempts to explore the role of Islam in this century in its historic heartland—the Middle East and Western Asia—which happens also to be the area that has generated most excitement about Islam these last few years" (pp. 19-20). Mortimer's honesty is refreshing, since it reflects almost exactly the outlook of most Western audiences on Islam in the archipelago: who cares?

trying to gather data for his recent serialized interviews *cum* travelogue on the Muslim world, that to know Java is to have grasped the mystery of Indonesia.<sup>13</sup>

The reality is far more complex. Islam was not introduced into Indonesia initially by way of Java, but via Sumatra, particularly the northern region of Aceh and the western region of Minangkabau. (Nearly all of those Indonesian Muslim activists labeled by Naipaul and others as "fundamentalist" are Sumatrans, most of whom have traveled abroad and often resided in Arab Muslim countries). The extent to which any stratum of Javanese society has been Islamized and made to accord with Middle Eastern norms, reflecting the primacy of Arabic as a canon of literary sacrality and Arab history as the locus of Islamic fortunes, whether in glory or defeat, is problematic.

Scholars of Indonesian Islam, like their counterparts working on South Asia, West Asia, and Africa, are prone to use technical terms which reflect the local cultural context but are meaningless to outsiders. An Indonesian scholar would summarize what was said in the preceding paragraph by noting that Sumatrans are closer to strict *santri* Islam, while the Javanese tend to follow *abangan* or indigenous, popular Islam. Yet the use of these terms in a preliminary, general discussion of Indonesia predisposes the enquirer to assume that real Islam never took hold in Indonesia, that the chasm between *statistik* and *fanatik* Muslims in Indonesia is unbridgeable. One scholar has even gone so far as to conclude that "for all the overwhelming number of Islam's formal adherents in Indonesia, which make it on paper the world's largest Muslim nation, *unambiguous Islam is a minority religion*."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>V. S. Naipaul [*Among Believers: An Islamic Journey* (New York: Knopf, 1981)] is at once the most literate and the most fallacious expose of the contemporary Muslim world. Content with superficial encounters, he is preoccupied with the rage which he finds everywhere, not least in Indonesia. Interviewing a Sulawesi businessman in a Jakarta hotel, Naipaul listens to the man talk against the Javanese and the Chinese. He deduces: "Rage was the response of this man: rage, seemingly political, that was really Islamic, an end in itself; and racial rage" (p. 355). Rage blown up into fantasy, issuing in the drama of actual violence—Naipaul interpreted through the voices and saw in the faces of nearly all his Muslim contacts. Yet he never found the Islam for which he was searching—perhaps because he did not believe that it existed in the first place! Each Muslim believer is confronted with Naipaul's insistent agnosticism (e.g., see p. 258), spawning further reflections on the insecurity endemic to Islam!

<sup>14</sup>Ruth McVey, "Faith as the Outsider: Islam in Indonesian Politics" in J. Piscatori, ed., *Islam in the Political Process* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 200. The writer is an expert on the development of the Communist movement in Indonesia; see her *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965). She has skillfully used the data on Muslim modernism set forth by M. K. Hassan, ed., *Muslim Intellectual Responses to "New Order" Modernism in Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980). It is the wider implications of *unambiguous Islam* which she, together with her sources, has tended to minimize or neglect.



That statement presupposes a norm of what Islam ought to be in its unambiguous or pure expression, which in turn refers to the Middle East and to Arab linguistic, cultural and historical priorities as inseparable from that defining norm. Reformers who came to Indonesia in the 19th and 20th centuries or, more accurately, came back to Indonesia after performing a protracted *hajj*, often made just this sort of judgment on the beliefs and practices of their fellow Indonesian Muslims: they were riddled with ambiguity; they needed to be clarified, reformed, Arabicized. All who begin with an Arab model of Islamic identity/conformity assume that there are few real, unambiguous Muslims in Indonesia.

Yet the reverse of the Arab centrist/conformist argument applies IF we approach Indonesia as a test case, a manifestation of Islam's ability to decolonize itself. The properties of Indonesia as a Muslim country need not and should not be judged by criteria external to itself, relative to some allegedly pure, irreducibly foreign norm.

Who would argue that Eastern Orthodox Christians or Baptist fundamentalists ought to be judged by some universally approved standard on the adequacy or inadequacy of their very different expressions of Christian loyalty? Both groups acknowledge Jerusalem as a sacred city embodying an aspect of their religious past and contemporary spiritual outlook, yet they share little else that binds them together within a single cohesive religious community labeled the Christian Church. We accept that anomaly as part of the historical development of Christianity; we are reluctant to allow, much less marvel at, a similar polymorphous differentiation for the Muslim community.

There is, of course, a major distinction. Normative Islam posits not merely a loosely affiliated body of believers but also a universal brotherhood inclusive of all those who profess belief in a single, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient God, a series of prophetic messengers stretching back to the first man, Adam, and culminating in the 7th-century Arab merchant, Muḥammad, as well as an unalterable scripture fixing precise criteria for belief and conduct. In Indonesia, however, the identity of most Muslims as Muslims—certainly, the identity of most Javanese as Muslims—is determined less decisively by the specific exigencies of the Qur'ān than by the circumstances of their own history within the archipelago. That history is told and retold by Indonesian Muslims with near total disregard for its insular oddity, its abrupt disjuncture, from Islam beyond the archipelago. Yet corresponding to the prideful emic description of island Islam is its pervasive etic devaluation: most students of Indonesian Islam, with the exception of a few progressive social scientists,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The new directions charted by C. Geertz [*The Religion of Java* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960)] have not been pursued by others or even by Geertz himself in his later writings [e.g., *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) omits discussion of the interrelationship between *abangan*, *santri* and *priyayi* groups of central Java so effectively nuanced in

uniformly assess it as a belated, imperfect, impure, lesser expression of true, universal, classical/reformist Arab Islam.

To restore a sense of balance, one must examine carefully the distinctly Javanese sense of culture and power, as Benedict Anderson has done,<sup>16</sup> and at the same time acknowledge the emergence of a predominantly rural, Indonesian form of Islamic education. Known as the *pesantren* system, it is an avowedly pre-Islamic indigenous educational institution adopted by Muslim scholars for their own religious purposes.<sup>17</sup> All the varieties of modernist or traditionalist Islam for which one may locate a strain in the fabric of Indonesian society pale by comparison with the influence which this institution, through its local leaders, known as *kiyayi*, has exerted in Indonesia. Yet the *kiyayi* conform to none of the scholarly training or expected outlook of Muslim 'ulama who belong to the Sarekat Islam or Nahdat ul-ulema or other Islamic groups in Indonesia. Recently, I tried to determine who was a representative *kiyayi* and if it were possible to get some of his writings, if only his sermons, to study them. The answer I received, like the query I posed, was twofold: (1) each *kiyayi* represents only his own constituency, and while there was constant appeal to the Qur'an (cited in Arabic), it was not consistent, nor did *kiyayi* rely on classical commentaries or the legal-theological writings of great Muslim thinkers. (One observer went so far as to say that literacy was not highly prized among many Indonesian Muslims precisely because the Dutch had pre-empted the *priyayi* or "Hinduized" administrative elite, and used Arabic-proficient Muslim scholars to extend their control over the archipelago). (2) few of the *kiyayi* sermons were translated into any language since they circulated in standard Indonesian, itself a recent "official"

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*The Religion of Java*, especially Chapter 22, "Conflict and Integration." The common tendency is to assume that the *santri* element represents true Islam because their exponents express loyalty to *unambiguous* Islam, which other Indonesians resent or oppose for a variety of reasons].

<sup>16</sup>B. R. O'G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" in C. Holt, ed., *Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 1-70. The charismatic power deriving from personal asceticism is traced with a broad analysis of the traditional Javanese view toward both nature and the historical process. Of a different order but also valuable for discerning the mobilizing force of Islamic symbols in Java are K. D. Jackson's writings, especially "Participation in Rebellion: The Dar 'ul-Islam in Western Java" in R. W. Liddle, ed., *Political Participation in Modern Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 1-57, and *Traditional Authority, Islam and Rebellion: A Study of Indonesian Political Behavior* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>17</sup>Numerous accounts of the *pesantren* are now available, but the most broadly comparativist remains C. Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Chapter 14, "The Santri Educational System." For a more recent statement of their role in Java, see Abdurrahman Wahid (also caricatured by Naipaul, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-303), "Cultural Diversity and Religious Unity in Islam: The Indonesian Experience," *Bulletin of the Secretariat for non-Christian Dialogue* XVII/2 (1982), pp. 252-257.

language attempting to bridge and coalesce the several dialects extant in different islands of the archipelago. Moreover, since the appeal was directed to Indonesians, and they represented a potential readership of millions, why bother with any translation?

The last exchange underscores the character of Indonesian Islam: it is not only diverse but localized. It has numerous forms within the range of islands that make up the archipelago, and the appeal of several groups, even those with a reformist or modernist bent who relate to Middle Eastern models, is to local communities within Indonesia. Internal integration is deemed more important than international realignment.

If forces coming into the islands are neutralized, those directed beyond them are also minimal. The closest group to an Indonesian missionary movement, exporting Islam beyond the archipelago, is the Muhammadiyah, whose major literary/intellectual figure is approvingly cited by non-Muhammadija Indonesian Muslims as the outstanding Islamic scholar of present-day Indonesia. Yet even Muhammad Hamka is lauded more for his abilities as a speaker in the *kiyayi* mold than for his achievements as a scholar in the *santri* or *'alim* tradition. When I pestered Indonesian friends about this seeming contradiction, they smilingly replied that there were two kinds of Islam, Middle Eastern Islam and "our" Islam. But at the same time they expressed pride that the worldwide Muslim community was one, united, indivisible.

Indonesian Islam is admittedly elusive. It is easier to dismiss it or minimize it than to try to understand its complex layers of historical development and current expression. None of its determinative qualities make sense apart from the Indonesian perspective on the Islamic past. That past is seen as a regionalized or, even more, a localized history, in which values, actors and events that are Indonesian shape the minds of nearly all those concerned with Islam in the archipelago. The larger history of Islam, which extends back to the origin of the Muslim community in 7th-century A.D. Arabia, is foreign to Indonesians, not only as non-Arab Muslims, but particularly as Southeast Asian Muslims for whom Arabia is an orientation of prayer but not priority. The contrast of Indonesian Muslims with the rest of the Muslim world derives as much from their perception of history as from any set of cultural traits. The difference is instructive, especially when trying to assess the parameters of the Nile-to-Oxus Islamic *mythomoteur*, which is also the driving force of Islamic fundamentalism.

One further example may help to illustrate how axiomatic yet problematic it is to approach Islamic fundamentalism from Java rather than from Mecca. Possibly the most comprehensive survey of the entire Arab/Asian Muslim world ever attempted was the late Carlo Caldarola's *magnum opus*, *Religion and Societies: Asia and the Middle East*, published by Mouton in 1982. Despite the superb essays solicited from a variety of experts and the imaginative format underlying and sustaining the whole work, there is a hackneyed, trivialized tone to the segment of Caldarola's introductory



essay concerning Islam. He ascribes to Islam five historical periods: a first and glorious period of ascent, 632-1258, from the death of Muḥammad to the fall of Baghdad,<sup>18</sup> followed by a second period of severe military defeats, continuing till the 15th century. The third period is characterized by a wide-scale reformulation of political loyalty: the Islamic world is divided into a plurality of independent units, effecting splits so deep and pervasive, in Caldarola's view, that they purged the *umma* of its putative unity. The fourth period of Islamic history, from the 18th century till after World War II, saw the disintegration of these same Muslim empires, coincident with the rise of Europe and the dominance of Western/European colonialism over the Islamic world. Only in the fifth period, from the end of World War II to the present, did Muslim countries achieve political independence, which allowed/required the involvement of both religious leaders (*'ulama*) and masses in the governmental process. It is the difficult choice between modernism and traditionalism, or rather the retention of values from the latter while aspiring for benefits from the former, which preoccupies Caldarola and most contemporary observers of the Muslim world. Yet from the Indonesian viewpoint the real issue is the inappropriateness of Caldarola's periodization—not unique to him yet the more poignant because of the transregional scope of his work—for their own participation in *dar al-Islam*. They did not experience either the triumph of the initial period or the opprobrium of military disaster followed by schismatic imperialism, both Muslim and European, in subsequent periods. For Indonesians, *that* is Arab or Middle Eastern history, with its own set of valencies. It is a localized version of *their* Islam, which does not suit, and is not linked to, the Indonesian chapter of Islamic history.

Let us shift our focus to the north of Java and slightly to the east of Sumatra. Let us examine the course of Islam in the Malay Peninsula, in what is now (since 1957) recognized as the independent nation-state of Malaysia. The picture is very different, beginning with the stubborn yet informative facts of geography. Malaysia is a peninsular extension of mainland Asia. Though it has two island appendages in Sarawak and Sabah, which present their special problems, the contiguity of Malaysia with Thailand and Burma and ultimately China has shaped its history. Chinese immigrant laborers, together with overseas Indians, were brought to the Malay Peninsula and began to settle there as far back as the 16th century. Their numbers increased dramatically with the development of a plantation economy, and its heightened labor demands under British occupation, beginning in the 18th century. Both communities remained

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<sup>18</sup>Other problems aside, most historians would now sharply question the effective independence of the 'Abbasid Caliphate after the capture and control of Baghdad by the Shi'i Buyids (945-1055), however durable was the symbolic legitimization of the Caliph for other elites, including the Buyids, who ruled through him.

apart from, and unintegrated with, indigenous residents of the peninsula, known as Malays. What one finds in Malaysia today is a society where status as a Muslim is closely associated with the racial and linguistic markings of one group, the indigenous Malays. To be Malay is to be Muslim, and *vice versa*. So firm is this interchangeable identity that the sizeable Chinese and Indian minorities of Malaysia are loath to identify with any expression of Islamic loyalty, especially that which is inferred by the notion of an Islamic state.

The tale of the Muslim community in Malaysia, like that of its Indonesian neighbor, can be told with reference to purely local markings: the arrival of Islamic missionaries in particular parts of the country, their spread of beliefs, development of rituals, formation of groups loyal to Islam in the centuries preceding British rule. As was the case with Indonesia, it was the central government which took a lead role in establishing Islam as the protected religion, if not the state religion, of independent Malaysia. Islam became, according to the Malay constitution of 1957, the official religion of the Malay Federation, at the same time that it was permissible to practice, even to proselytize on behalf of, other religions. The great debate since 1957 has focused on the degree of public adherence to Islamic loyalties mandated by the ruling Malays. Any increase in Islamization threatens to impinge on the religious liberties enjoyed *pari passu* by most Chinese and most Hindus of the Malay Peninsula since Independence.

It is into this breach of possibility that Muslim activists have moved, not hesitating to use Islam as a means for promoting their own economic or political goals, which they see as inseparable and indistinguishable from their religious goals as Malay Muslims. The major test case has been the economically backward Muslim community of unfederated Kelantan, in the northeastern region of the Malay Peninsula. Organized into a Pan-Malay Islamic Party (PMIP) since Independence, many Kelantan Muslim leaders have used Islamic loyalty as an ideological platform from which to advocate control of their regional destiny and at the same time opposition to modernist/capitalist interests of the Malay Federation centered in Kuala Lumpur, where the largest concentration of Chinese and Indian Malaysians also reside.

The issues and actors in the Kelantan struggle are central for determining one aspect of one part of the Muslim community in Malaysia,<sup>19</sup> yet it is primarily a local issue, with little far-reaching significance for Indonesian

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<sup>19</sup> A superb delineation of several features in the Kelantan struggle is set forth by Clive S. Kessler, "The Politics of Islamic Egalitarianism," *Humaniora Islamica* II (1974), pp. 237-252, although his dichotomization of religion and society must not be carried too far as Ira M. Lapidus has observed in "Notes and Comments," *Humaniora Islamica* II (1974), pp. 290-293. For a schematic overview of all segments in present-day Malaysian society, see Gordon Means, "Malaysia: Islam in a Pluralistic Society" in Caldarola, *op. cit.*, pp. 445-496.

Muslims, with much less the Muslim world beyond Southeast Asia. The same conclusion cannot be reached about the other form of Islamic activism in contemporary Malaysia. In the wake of events which took place in West Asia and South Asia since the 1970s, there has been an attempt to propagate Islamic ideals in the non-Malay ranks of Malaysian society beyond the boundaries constitutionally decreed in the '50s and generally accepted throughout the '60s. Some have termed this activity "fundamentalist."<sup>20</sup> It may be, in which case it reflects a Nile-to-Oxus *mythomoteur* that is as antithetical to the historical context of Malaysia as it is to that of Indonesia. While there are levels at which Malay Muslims relate more directly and self-consciously to their Arab coreligionists than do Indonesians, there is a sense in which they are equally removed from the perception of either a triumphalist past or a defeatist present, so indispensable to the fundamentalist world view. As a result, the actual threat of fundamentalist agents to the major trends in Malay society is minimal. The main impetus for such activity remains foreign in a double sense. It is foreign in origin, that is, it derives from events outside the Malay Peninsula which are related with difficulty to what goes on within contemporary Malaysia. Secondly, and more importantly, it is foreign in implementation. The proselytizing agents for what is termed Islamic fundamentalism are themselves non-Malays, specifically Pakistanis,<sup>21</sup> or they are Malays who have spent time in West Asia where they imbibed the activist ideology of Islamic fundamentalism.

Islam in Malaysia, like Islam in Indonesia, is inextricably interwoven into the fabric of some but not all parts of contemporary society. One can stress the impotence of Islam in either country if one devalues ethnic diversity and creedal pluralism, as does the political scientist who depicts Indonesia as a country where "Islam is an active minority—within a numerical majority—inside a pluralistic society under an authoritarian

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<sup>20</sup>The infectious hyperbole applied to current trends in Malaysia is evident in Moḥammad Abu Bakar, "Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia," *Asian Survey* 8/10 (October 1981), pp. 1040-1059. The moderating aspect of what he portends comes only at the end: "Apart from the non-Muslim Malaysians (ca. 50% of the population) who will object to the strict Islamization of society, the core of the Malay populace, still imbued with the old conception of religion, is likely to remain opposed to the current revivalism" (pp. 1058-1059). A clear though brief assessment of some shifts within the core group is offered by M. K. bin Hassan, "Education and Family Life in Modernizing Malaysia," in P. H. Stoddard, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-73.

<sup>21</sup>Naipaul is at his lurid best in depicting the Pakistani presence in contemporary Malaysia. In Southeast Asia "Islam spread as an idea—a Prophet, a divine revelation, heaven and hell, a divinely sanctioned code—and mingled with older ideas. To purify that mixed religion the Islamic missionaries now come; and it is still from the sub-continent—and especially from Pakistan—that the most passionate missionaries come. . . . Some go to Malaysia; they have been going for years; and now their passion finds a response" (pp. 212-213).



government engaged in secular development.”<sup>22</sup> Yet post-Independence Malaysia, as also Indonesia, has tended to emphasize the value of constitutionally mandated, legally enforceable pluralism. This is a circumstance without parallel elsewhere in the Muslim world among majority Muslim countries.<sup>23</sup> Rather than being treated as a problem for Islam, it may be acknowledged as still another instance of that remarkable capacity for decolonization which characterizes the modern as well as the pre-modern Muslim world.

Consider the fact that not only are there communities of people who are non-Muslim in both Malaysia and Indonesia but also that their citizenship within the nation is accepted as being equal to that of Muslims, except for access to the highest political office. At a *de facto* level, there may be other elements of discrimination, resulting in charges and counter-charges of unfair treatment; nor is the possibility of ugly race riots, with a thinly disguised religious motivation, precluded. They can and do take place in Malaysia, yet they must be seen against the background of a society which has moved from endemic pluralism, where, due to geography and history, several groups came to share a common space and destiny, through a transition period of colonial rule ending in a struggle for national liberation, after which emerged a self-governing society characterized by constitutional pluralism with its provision of rights to minorities under the protection of a secular constitution.

That is no mean achievement. It deserves to be highlighted, especially because this brand of legally mandated pluralism lends a distinctive institutional stamp to Southeast Asian Islam. It shapes, even as it is shaped by, other economic and political, linguistic and ethnic factors, throughout the religion. All need to be considered. Yet one major result is clear: it limits the scope of influence for Islamic fundamentalism in Malaysia; it precludes even its introduction into Indonesia.

## South Asia: Pakistan

How different is the story when we come to examine the status of Islam, and especially the emergence of an Islamic fundamentalist move-

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<sup>22</sup>D. K. Emmerson, “Islam in Modern Indonesia: Political Impasse, Cultural Opportunity,” in P. H. Stoddard, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>23</sup>The closest test case within *dar al-Islam* might seem to be Egypt, with its sizable (6%) Coptic minority, yet as D. Crecelius has observed [“The Course of Secularization in Modern Egypt” in D. E. Smith, ed., *Religion and Political Modernization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974)], the Egyptian Constitution of 1971 presents Islam as *the* state religion, implying that an implicit connection must and will be maintained between the *shari’a* and the political process (pp. 88 and 93). Though Crecelius has little patience for the symbolic significance which *shari’a* retention conveys for nearly all Nile-to-Oxus Muslims, he does highlight the dilemma of constitutionalism facing contemporary Egyptian policymakers.

ment, in contemporary South Asia!<sup>24</sup> Unlike Southeast Asia, the subcontinent is intimately linked with the historical perceptions of West Asian or Nile-to-Oxus Muslims. Central to that interconnection is the extended and intensive presence of Islam in regions boundaried by oceans and mountains, chiefly the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas in the North. Early ruling elites, headed by migrant Turkish warriors but including also merchants, administrators, *littérateurs* and scholars, came to settle in South Asia more than a thousand years ago. Islam subsequently encompassed broad strata of society. It affected the public, collective life of most South Asians, not just the outlook of particular groups identifying themselves as "Muslim."

Compared to Southeast Asia, one might deduce that Islam in South Asia failed, at least in the game of numbers. Despite the protracted period of Muslim rule in North India, most residents of the subcontinent did not embrace Islam. Except for certain areas in the northeastern and northwestern corridors of South Asia, Islam remained a minority religion—a significant, numerically large minority, but relative to the entire region, still a minority.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, however, Islam succeeded in South Asia in a manner not unlike its pattern of success in Southeast Asia. Those social groupings which did embrace Islam viewed it differently, depending on their pre-Islamic cultural values. Punjabis and Bengalis, for instance, both became Muslim in large numbers, even while retaining linguistic, ethnic and social distinctions which were not so much obliterated with the adoption of Islam as recast in an Islamic idiom. The South Asian Muslim community provides graphic illustration of R. Martin's normative statement: "Islam is ideally a brotherhood of believers, not a melting pot of ethnic groups."<sup>26</sup>

It was the period of British colonial rule, the emergence of the nationalist movement, and the postponed, almost pyrrhic, achievement of independence which caused South Asian Islam to take a dramatically different form than it did in Southeast Asia. While Islam proved to be a

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<sup>24</sup>Both Bangladesh and India have been excluded from direct consideration in this essay, even though their combined populations account for more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the Muslim community resident in the subcontinent. Neither nation is self-consciously in the forefront of universalist Islamic movements, due in Bangladesh's case to its delayed emergence as an independent nation-state (1971) and in India's case, to the difficulty of perpetuating as well as reshaping minority identity in a putatively secular state. Aspects of Muslim self-understanding in India have been discussed in B. Lawrence, "Islam in India/Islam in the World: Does the Paradigm Still Fit?", 1982 Aziz Ahmad Memorial Lecture, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto (forthcoming as Occasional Paper #3, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1985).

<sup>25</sup>B. Lawrence, "Islam in South Asia" in K. Crim, ed., *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), pp. 359-362.

<sup>26</sup>R. Martin, *Islam: A Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 61.

powerful cohesive force supporting the independence struggle in both Malaysia and Indonesia,<sup>27</sup> in South Asia it became a sharply divisive force. Those groups which comprised the Muslim political, economic, and social elites of the heavily Muslim Northern provinces of British India opted to found a nation-state separate from the rest of India precisely on the basis of Islam. Islam was not merely an ideology compelling separation from the British, it was an ideology militating separation, and independence, from Hindu and Sikh neighbors. Not all Muslims were drawn to the ideal of an Islamic state; many did not accept Pakistan as a *bona fide* political expression of Muslim aspirations even after its creation on an emotively religious platform, but gradually a consensus was formed to support, sustain and develop the fledgling state. The eastern flank, detached by more than a thousand miles from the western and politically dominant flank, retained strong affinities to its distinct, Bengali cultural idiom. Common religious loyalties could not overcome irreducible geographic, administrative and cultural barriers. A calamitous civil war, with enormous loss of life and social disruption, produced the further separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971.

Despite the difficulties attendant on the emergence of Pakistan, it has become a front-line Muslim state. Some delight in focusing on the doctrinal ambiguity which characterizes the Islamic beliefs of even the leading Pakistani religious scholars, as did the Munir Report of 1956. What seems more basic and recurrent is the Pakistani need—expressed constitutionally, societally and personally—to define Islamic identity in a manner consistent with the perceived outlook of the broadest majority, while also not alienating those minorities who are tolerable. Recent history has both helped and hindered the shaping of a consensus. Independence eliminated nearly all the Hindu and Sikh inhabitants of West Pakistan. The war of 1971 eliminated the Bengali sector, Muslim as well as Hindu. Beyond a Christian minority of perhaps one million, the most important and visible minority groups within Pakistan are non-Sunni Muslims. Ironically, one group, which on doctrinal grounds could certainly be deemed heretical, the Aga Khanis, seem above public criticism or governmental harassment. Ja'fari, or 12er, Shi'is and especially the Ahmadis are less well favored. It is the Ahmadis or Qadiyanis who have proved to be the greatest test for internal solidarity among Pakistan's Muslim population, and it is they who have been singled out to verify that Pakistan became what its founders set out to make it, an Islamic state.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>See C. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, pp. 82-87 for Sukarno's reflection—and manipulation—of the Islamic factor in Indonesian politics at the time of independence.

<sup>28</sup>The status of the Ahmadis or Qadiyanis was central to the deliberations of the Munir Report, while the beliefs and rituals of the Agha Khanis were almost uniformly ignored; see also the prolongation of this debate in Muhammad Munir, *From Jinnah to Zia* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1979). An assessment of the current status of the Ahmadis, following their legislative/constitutional redefinition as



The struggle for cohesion within Pakistan is closely linked to its external crisis, the identity of Pakistan within the Islamic world. Historically, the ancestors to the current ruling elites saw themselves as an integral part of *dar al-Islam*. Despite the separateness of the 3 medieval empires (Ottomans, Safavis and Mughals) which Caldarola and others have noted, it is the Pakistani perception that Islamic loyalties were binding on all three, and that the pan-Islamic *khilafat* movement, spearheaded by Indian Muslims on behalf of their Turkish coreligionists after World War I, symbolizes the pervasive sentiment of corporate loyalty between at least two medieval Islamic empires, the Mughal and the Ottoman.<sup>29</sup> There were also other transregional links for South Asian Muslims. Many learned Persian as a second language, even after the British abolished its official status as an administrative language for their Indian civil service in the early 19th century, and acquaintance with the sounds of Arabic, if not its grammatical structure or literary corpus, was also widespread. Nor were South Asian Muslims lacking in commercial bonds to the Arabian Peninsula, bonds which allowed them to straddle the indigenous culture of the subcontinent, predominantly Hindu, and Ottomanized Arab culture, a kind of cosmopolitan geometric aestheticism. Most importantly, for Pakistani elites, their sense of history was shaped by the sense of a universal mission *manqué*: at several points in time until the most recent era, it seemed, they had belonged to a polity that was not only competitive within the Muslim world, in rivaling Ottomans and Safavis, but also competitive throughout the known world, Hodgson's *oikumene*, stretching as far east as China and as far west as Europe.<sup>30</sup>

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non-Muslims (1974) and its implications for Shi'i Pakistanis, is set forth by Munir R. Ahmed, "Pakistan: The Dream of an Islamic State" in Caldarola, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-276. For a caricature of the Ahmadis, see once again V. S. Naipaul, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-209.

<sup>29</sup>The far-reaching significance of the *khilafat* movement for the political mobilization and eventual mass participation of Indian Muslims in the affairs of state has been outlined by G. Minault, "Islam and Mass Politics: The Indian Ulama and the Khilafat Movement" in D. E. Smith, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 168-182. Her thesis has been detailed in her recent book, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup>It is the flaw of many of the new breed of instant experts on Islam that they read back into medieval history a sense that Indian Muslims, the predecessors of contemporary Pakistanis, already perceived something wrong with their world in the 16th century. Not only was something wrong but the source of psychological ill-ease and ultimate defeat—economic, military and political—was the West. The period of British colonialism then becomes depicted as protracted *religious warfare*, in which white European Christians were consciously trying to dominate and subdue brown Asian Muslims; see Mortimer, *passim* but especially pp. 86-89.

This view is inaccurate history and bad theology, at once tendentious, superficial and wrong; it imputes to the West a self-confident aggressiveness, to Muslim leaders a bloc fatalist vision, capable only of generating passive/defensive responses to the West. Neither caricature fits.

It is against such a background that since 1947 South Asian Muslims (both Indians and Pakistanis, albeit with notable contrasts) have burdened themselves with a sense of the historic failure of Islam, its precipitate decline on the scale of collective power, actual or perceived. Some of the most poignant writers on this theme have been Muhammad Iqbal, Abu'l-'Ala Mawdudi, and Abu'l-Hasan Nadwi. Underlying their malaise is a wrestling with the peculiarly Islamic conflation of religious loyalty and political control: one cannot be fully Muslim unless one lives in a state whose framework is avowedly Muslim, and Islam cannot succeed unless Muslim states operate in an independent mode, consciously and assertively pursuing Islamic principles, among the world community of nation-states.

Neither Iqbal nor Mawdudi came to this realization easily or early in their careers. Though Iqbal helped to formulate the ideal of Pakistan, he was less engaged by its implementation. Mawdudi saw Western-style nationalism as an evil not to be appropriated and recycled with Islamic coloration.<sup>31</sup> Nadwi, by contrast, pre-empted the whole problem of South Asian Muslim nationalism, both in his person and in his popular essays. He remains a citizen of independent, secular India. Mute on the Pakistani alternative, he assails the question of Islam's decline without reference either to the status of Muslims in a nation-state or the role of Muslim nations in the international arena. His preoccupations are at once evocative and unrealistic. He locates the cause of Islam's failure in Muslims themselves, the materialistic West serving as a mere counterfoil to Muslim neglect; his hope for the future is directed to the core of the Muslim world, the Arab world.

In the early 1950s Nadwi published an essay, "What has the world lost through the decline of the Muslims?"<sup>32</sup> Its outline features remain as vivid for Nadwi today as for the host of Muslim apologists who echo his lament:

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<sup>31</sup>See the overly schematic but still valuable monograph by S. Riaz Ahmad, *Mawlana Mawdudi and the Islamic State* (Lahore: People's Publishing House, 1976). Also, C. J. Adams, "The Ideology of Maulana Mawdudi" in D. E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 391-397. For apologetic elaborations of Mawdudi's views on the Islamic state, consult Abdo E. Elkholi, "The Concept of Community in Islam" and K. Ahmad/Z. I. Ansari, "Mawdudi: An Introduction to His Vision of Islam and Islamic Revival" in K. Ahmad/Z. I. Ansari, eds., *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawdudi* (London: Islamic Foundation, 1979), pp. 171-181, 359-383.

<sup>32</sup>Von Grünebaum's trenchant article on Nadwi, "Fall and Rise of Islam: A Self-View," first published in 1956 and reprinted in *Modern Islam* (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 244-247, has been dissected as a modern form of *munazara*, or polemical disputation, by Abdallah Laroui, "The Arabs and Cultural Anthropology: Notes on the Method of Gustave von Grünebaum," *op. cit.*, pp. 44-80. The gist of Laroui's critique is von Grünebaum's failure to multiply the definitional levels of Islam rather than to conflate Islam as history, Islam as behavior, Islam as culture and Islam as faith (pp. 73-80). We would maintain, however, that von Grünebaum has accurately reflected the conflation present in

in a June 1983 address at Oxford University Nadwi repeated the same message. It is with reference to the unchanging past that we chart our course for an uncertain future. The focal point of glory, for Muslims, was the first chapter in their corporate existence, the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-661). That was the epitome of human history, exemplifying a "perfect balance of religious and political, practical and spiritual, aspirations and activities." All events after 661 augured a decline from this original, high plateau of Arab Islam. Nadwi concedes that the Turks had a chance to revive Islamic fortunes, but they failed to keep pace with the new sciences and skills, especially relating to warfare, which came out of Europe from the 16th century on. Europe by the 20th century had ratified Islam's decline everywhere . . . but only on the external plane through their material/technological success. On the internal plane Europe's achievements lacked that element of vision, faith and morality which characterized early Islam and barring which, "the development of ephemeral knowledge, science and technology yoked to unbridled politics and physical gratification has brought humanity to the verge of self-destruction."<sup>33</sup>

Nadwi's apocalyptic characterization of the West is a caricature. Though it is not shared by all Muslims—whether of South Asia or West Asia (in Southeast Asia it is scarcely known)—it has proved to be as durable a fictive construct as its complement, the hope of a recovery of Muslim fortunes through the agency of the Arab world. Nadwi criticizes Muslims and Muslim states who strive to Europeanize. The Muslim *ummah* has as its mission in the present era the defeat of European might and eradication of the European spirit, just as in the first century *hijri* it had a similar mission toward the pre-Islamic kingdoms of Persia and Byzantium. The preparation for this struggle is spiritual; it requires a resurrection of faith, concomitant with mastery of scientific and technological skills, military as well as commercial. Nothing less than a new *jihād* is required, with the Arab world, divided though it is, reclaiming the mantle of leadership from the Rashidun, in order to lead the *ummah* to triumph over the West in fulfillment of "the hope of mankind."<sup>34</sup>

Nadwi is the master articulator and propagator of what might be termed "hot rhetoric," outlining a utopian plan with no intermediary steps

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Nadwi's essay. Hence, while Nadwi's title refers to the "decline of the Muslims," his essay becomes an apologia for the dilemma of Muslim faith rather than a commentary on the vagaries of Islamic history. Muslims become identified with Islam, Islam with Muslims. The flattened perspective impoverishes Nadwi's analysis as it does that of Western observers, less often scholars like von Grünebaum than essayists like Mortimer, who make assumptions similar to Nadwi's.

<sup>33</sup>Von Grünebaum, *op. cit.*, p. 249, and S. A. Nadwi, *Islam and the West* (Lucknow: Islamic Research Publications, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>34</sup>Von Grünebaum, *op. cit.*, p. 255.



of analysis or practical program of implementation. He exemplifies what Abdallah Laroui has termed the vanguard of historical retardation among Arab Islamic intellectuals: even though he is South Asian rather than Arab in his generic and geographical placement, he advocates the Arab cause as passionately as once did the proponents of Arab nationalism.<sup>35</sup>

Quite opposite is the posture of a leading Islamic ideologue, a fundamentalist lay preacher and pamphleteer from present-day Lahore, Dr. Israr Ahmad. Both lauded and feared because of his unequivocal pronouncements about the undesirability, from an Islamic viewpoint, of women's participation in the Pakistani work force, Israr Ahmad undergirds his approach through a skeletal view of history which corresponds on many points with Nadwi's. Like Nadwi, Israr believes that the Muslim *ummah* has risen and declined. He sees the high point of Islamic history *not* with the Rashidun (the first four Caliphs to succeed Muḥammad) but with their successors, the Umayyad Caliphs. In his view, "the Umayyad era (661-750) marked the real prestige, power and supremacy of the purely Arab race."<sup>36</sup> That Arab purity was diminished by the influx of Persians during the subsequent Abbasid Caliphate, and Muslim fortunes faded until the Ottomans "produced a Muslim renaissance in the heart of the Islamic world."<sup>37</sup> Ottoman success, alas, was curtailed by the deluge of European colonialism, a deluge which, in Israr's words, "eventually conquered the right and left wings of the Islamic world," reducing the Ottoman Empire to its lamentable position as the sick man of Europe. Subsequently, during the 20th century, the Muslim world experienced greater and greater ignominies at the hands of Western colonial powers. The nadir of Islamic impotence was symbolized in two disasters, the Arab defeat of 1967 and the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971.<sup>38</sup>

Superficially, it might seem that Israr, like Nadwi, is overwhelmed by the spectre of past glory and present atrophy. Though Israr traces a variant pattern of decline for the Muslim *ummah*, he, too, seizes on the West as the agent dooming Islamic hopes. Yet in his recapitulation of the past, Israr adduces a quite different explanation for the causes of Islam's decline. Since Allah is omniscient as well as omnipotent, even the decline must be providential, i.e., it is a form of divine retribution against Muslims for their failure to be true to their scriptural sources, like the earlier vengeful

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<sup>35</sup>See endnote 6, *supra*, for a comparison of Nadwi with Husri.

<sup>36</sup>Dr. Israr Ahmad, *Rise and Decline of the Muslim Ummah*, with a comparison to Jewish history, (Lahore: Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran, 1980), p. 14. Even in the title of this pamphlet-length essay, itself a translation from the Urdu original, Israr distinguishes between the Muslim community (*ummah*), contingent and historical, and Islamic doctrines, revelational and trans-historical or eternal.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

retribution of the Almighty against the Jews for their deviance from the Torah. The initial chastisement of Allah against the Muslims took place in the 12th/13th centuries, when first the Crusades, then the Mongols (Tartars) wreaked havoc and destruction in the heart of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Ottomans provided a reprieve from those calamities. They were the mediaries of divine grace for the Muslims during the period of their rule. The second chastisement of Allah began in the 20th century with the defeat of the Ottoman Turks. It culminated in the events of 1967 and 1971. 1971, for Israr, represents the final limit of the present deterioration of the Muslim *ummah*, for which the corresponding divine chastisement was the spilling of Muslim blood between non-Bengalis and Bengalis. Its immediate, human cause was the same racial and regional prejudice which characterizes the Western Muslim world, where Arabs, despite their linguistic unity, find themselves unable to cooperate for common goals. The retribution for their discord was the ignominious defeat of 1967.

Israr's vision, while no less nostalgic than Nadwi's, is palpably more graphic . . . and hopeful. It is in the pronouncement of a termination to the historical downcurve that Israr charts hope. Muslims who understand these tragic events now have the opportunity/the mandate to respond, to reform and to revitalize the *ummah* as the community of God's apostle it was intended to be. Who are these Muslims, at once victims of God's wrath and beneficiaries of His grace? *Pace* Nadwi, they are not to be the Arabs. Israr flatly declares: "it is common knowledge that Arabs do not have a sincere and tangible attachment to Islam at present."<sup>39</sup> Despite the Qadiyani or Ahmadi problem, it is in Pakistan that Israr locates the hope for an Islamic future since "nowhere else is orthodox Islam so firmly rooted among the masses as here (in Pakistan) . . . Even the Arabian Peninsula, despite the reformist efforts of Muḥammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, is far behind Pakistan in this respect."<sup>40</sup>

All of Israr's subsequent program for his movement, including the elimination of women from the public work force (outlined in widely circulated pamphlets and periodicals, supplementing his weekly appearance on TV), depends on the historical vision he charts from the past and projects into the future. The agents of transmission, the embodiments of divine grace supplanting His wrath, are to be Pakistanis rather than Arabs. Their mission is consonant with scriptural roots and historical developments. They face the task of defeating the West by first realigning the world around them. The linchpin is faith, a deepened, enveloping faith. The problem with all earlier, as also other present-day, revivalist movements is their failure to plummet the depth of Islamic faith. In his words,

The import of all these movements is more social and political than religious. They are more this-worldly than other-worldly. They are

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

distinguished from other political and economic movements only in holding the Islamic way of life as a better solution to human problems than the life systems enunciated by capitalistic democracy or communism. And this is tantamount to saying that the task of reviving the real values of Islam has not yet been started."<sup>41</sup>

Israr's appeal is self-consciously elitist, his model for revivalism hydraulic. Only a few can grasp the inward existential import of faith (*hal* over *qal*), and it is these "few dedicated and selfless preachers whose sole aim in life is the pursuit of Allah's pleasure, whose personalities and character will bear witness to the truth of a poetic line: not merely a reader of the Qur'ān, a true Muslim is the Qur'ān personified."<sup>42</sup> Such persons will not only refute Western thought, they will give the lie to its inherent atheism and materialism which has flooded the human mind for over 200 years. The masses of people will be drawn to their mission by dint of the power of their Qur'ānically molded personalities.

Israr offers no blueprint for action beyond this stage, no hint at the difficulties of maintaining a contemporary social and economic order, either internally or externally. It is the absence of such engagement with practical issues which gives Israr's appeal its directness and simplicity, just as it also makes the implementation of his program as an effective group ideology problematic.

It would be foolhardy to suggest that ideology alone determines the future direction of societies within or beyond the Muslim world, nor do Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and Israr Ahmad typify the whole spectrum of ideological speculation either in secular India or theocratically minded Pakistan. What must be noted, however, is the pervasive *mythomoteur* for both men and their constituencies. It derives from a selective but tenacious reading of the past. One relies on the role of Arabs for reviving Islamic hope (Nadwi); the other rejects Arab capabilities and focuses on the election of "orthodox" Pakistan to serve as the vanguard of a revitalized *ummah*.

However one surmises the future of the South Asian Muslim community, Israr is a much more serious force to contend with than Nadwi because he marshals his seemingly nostalgic recapitulation of the past into a gripping consciousness of present realities (the 1967 and 1971 wars), with a detailed program for future action. He also leads an organization which is committed to the implementation of that program, both in Pakistan and abroad.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Dr. Israr Ahmad, *Islamic Renaissance—The Real Task Ahead* (Lahore: Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran, 1980), p. 17. One of the earliest of Israr's essays, this was originally published in Urdu in his periodical, *Meethaq* (June 1967), and thereafter in several printings as an independent pamphlet.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup>The popularity of Israr as both a radio and television personality in contemporary Pakistan is as pleasing to his followers as it is anxiety-provoking to his



It is ironic that while Nadwi feigns interest in the modern world (calling for a mastery of science and technology), he, in fact, ignores its most evident manifestation: nationalism. Israr, by contrast, never mentions the benefits of modernization, yet tailors his program to make maximum use of a global communications network.

## Beyond Pakistan: Egypt and Iran

Israr Ahmad bears comparison with Islamic fundamentalists who have emerged from, and identify with, the Arab Muslim world, such as the Egyptian Ikhwan al-muslimun of the '50s and '60s and, more recently, activist preachers such as Shaykh Kishk of Alexandria. Like Israr, and unlike Nadwi, they are drawn to a pragmatic ideology, where assertion of Islam's decline is coupled with an insistence on the need for its ascent—if Qur'ānic dictates are understood and implemented, if all levels of society, especially nationalist leaders of the military mold, are held up to moral standards, if the dominance of the West is confronted within as well as beyond the borders of the Arab Muslim world. The impact of Sayyid Qutb, the chief theoretician and exemplar martyr of the Ikhwan, has been enormous: not only did Sayyid Qutb oppose narrowly defined, restrictive Arab nationalism but he also advocated social justice as the overriding message of the Qur'ān.<sup>44</sup> Shaykh Kishk has a similar populist ring to his countless sermons and myriad pamphlets. What links both Qutb and Kishk to Israr is their common appeal to a model of authoritative, Qur'ānically derived conduct, an ethic at once individual and collective, by the application of which Islamic preeminence can be regained. The agents of change for Israr are the Pakistanis; for the Ikhwan and Kishk, the Arabs, repeatedly referred to as Muslim Arabs. The real emphasis of the latter, however, is on Egypt as the locus and weather vane of Arab fortunes.

The emphasis is worth noting, if only because it is so often assumed and passed over. The passionate advocates of purified Islamic hegemony are Egyptians; their immediate audience are Egyptian elites in flux. The

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detractors. Almost no one, however, can deny the importance of issues which he raises. His influence in the Pakistani emigre communities of North America, e.g., Toronto, is high, and his organization aims to insure his continued visibility. Still, one may doubt that he will ever attain the prominence of Mawdudi (with whom he was once aligned and for whom he continues to evince a distant respect), or that it is accurate to fear, as do some Western-oriented Pakistanis, the "Israrization" of Islam in the Punjab and perhaps eventually in all Pakistan.

<sup>44</sup>The primary text remains *Al-'Adalah al-ijtima'iyah fi'l-Islam*, English translation, *Social Justice in Islam* (New York: Octagon, 1970). It is not reckoned as one of his principal documents by F. Ajami ("In the Pharaoh's Shadow: Religion and Authority in Egypt," in J. Piscatori, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 23). Yet A. Hourani certainly has this work in mind when he concludes that Islam "to be effective [in contemporary Muslim politics]—needs to be combined with two other languages: that of nationalism—and that of social justice" (Piscatori, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-292).

so-called masses are invoked, but not really involved. The twofold assumption is: (1) that the Arab world is the core of the Muslim world and (2) that Egypt is the heart, as also the mirror, of the Muslim world.<sup>45</sup> The famous circles of Gamal Abdel Nasser depicted a world in which Egypt was the center. Its three concentric circles were: Arab, African and Islamic in specific hierarchic arrangement.<sup>46</sup> While there has been much debate about the comparative priority of the three groups, nearly everyone assumes Egypt to be the center, the cynosure of all the ethnic/geographic groupings that matter—Arab, African and Islamic.

A major point of our enquiry is to call into question this assumed identification of Arab, or Arab-Egyptian, interests with Islamic doctrinal values. Whatever the outcome of the fundamentalist battle within the present-day Muslim Arab world it has little mythic, and certainly no actual, relationship to peoples who lie historically beyond the Arab sphere, viz., the Muslims of Southeast Asia, who are included in Nasser's outer but not his inner circle. The Iranians, too, represent a group excluded until recently from these calculations. Though it is almost directly in response to the Iranian Revolution that concern for Islamic fundamentalism has surfaced and engulfed analysts—from copy-editors to press-editors, from Department of Defense policy planners to stockmarket crisis experts—despite that explicit connection of the Iranian Revolution to the burgeoning interest in Islamic fundamentalism, the Islamic Republic of Iran is only incidentally related to the *mythomoteur* of the Muslim Arab world. One of the principal anti-Pahlavi ideologues, who also fell out of favor in Khomeini's camp during 1979-1980 but is now back in favor, was Ali Shariati. His thoughts and writings are frequently compared with those of Khomeini.<sup>47</sup> In a recent translation of some of his lectures (Shariati never sat down to write a systematic tome; he excelled as a lecturer/teacher), Shariati emphasizes the pivotal role of Islam as an ideology in Africa. Indeed, he sees the situation of Africans vis-à-vis the Qur'ān today to be similar to that of Iranians when they were faced with the hurdle of

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<sup>45</sup>F. Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, pp. 52-62. Chapter 2 is entitled, "Egypt as State, as Arab Mirror," to underscore the centrality of Egypt within the Arab world.

<sup>46</sup>Originally presented in Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Cairo, 1954), pp. 53-56, the three circles are further discussed in von Grünebaum, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-202 and 286-289.

<sup>47</sup>See especially Mongol Bayat, "The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79: Fundamentalism or Modern?" *Middle East Journal* 37/1 (Winter 1983), p. 34. The use of fundamentalism as a suitable category to describe Khomeini's outlook must be expanded beyond N. Keddie's "common-sense" definition, e.g., in her otherwise valuable article, "Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 88 (June 1983), p. 579 fn. The double orientation to scriptural authority and an idealized past is a feature of traditionalist as well as fundamentalist thinking; it is the mandated use of technology, viz., modern means of communication and warfare, that distinguishes the latter from the former.

canonical Arabic as a scriptural norm in the first centuries of Islam. "We Iranians," he declares, "still do not have a decent Persian translation of the Qur'ān, despite the fact that even from the outset of our conversion to Islam, we Iranians were much better informed in Islamic principles than the Arabs."<sup>48</sup>

It is loyalty to Islamic principles rather than the Arabic language or Arab cultural values that motivates Shariati. Khomeini, too, stresses a non-Arab model, though on different lines than Shariati. In his most famous work, *Hukumat-i Islami*, he presents an array of arguments on behalf of the *vilayet-i faqih* as the necessary instrument for giving political shape to the realities of Islamic faith. Among the numerous enemies whom he castigates and commends as candidates for eternal damnation are colonialist exploiters; those of the West, especially the United States, have been much discussed. Scarcely noted, however, has been a second category of colonialist exploiters, those Western powers who *in the past* prevented Islamic unity. They are signaled out for criticism in *Hukumat-i Islami*:

When the Ottoman State appeared as a united state, the colonialist(s) sought to fragment it. The Russians, the British and their allies united and fought the Ottomans and then shared the loot, as you all know. We do not deny that most rulers of the Ottoman State lacked ability, competence and qualifications and many of them ruled the people in a despotic manner. However, the colonialists were afraid that some pious and qualified persons would, with the help of the people, assume leadership of the Ottoman State and [would safeguard] its unity, ability, strength and resources, thus dispersing the hopes and aspirations of the colonialists.<sup>49</sup>

Khomeini condemns the colonialist bloc of Russians, British and their allies, but not for what they did to Iran, although history provides generous evidence for a case to be made there. Instead, Khomeini credits the rival Ottoman state as the bastion of Islamic unity during the 19th century. The rulers, of course, are discredited as incompetent and despotic, yet popularly inspired religious leadership, sponsoring a revolution similar to that which swept Iran in 1978-79, is seen as the deep, underlying motive for colonialist endeavors to break Ottoman unity.

The injustice committed against 'Alī and his younger son, Husayn, during the first century of the Islamic era remains the primary *mythomoteur* of Shi'i political thought, but note how the ancillary construct of colonialist

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<sup>48</sup>Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam*, English translation, Fatollah Marjani (Houston: FILINC, 1981), p. 91.

<sup>49</sup>Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, English translation, Joint Publications Research Service (Arlington, VA: 1979), p. 18. H. Algar [*Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981)] provides a more literal rendition of the same passage, using the term "imperialist" instead of "colonialist," linking external imperialism to internal tyranny and stressing the obligation of the individual Muslim to oppose and overthrow "all treacherous, corrupt, oppressive and criminal regimes" (pp. 48-49).



injustice against the Ottoman state updates the mythic struggle and supports Khomeini's contention that he is speaking not only on behalf of the Shi'i Muslims of Iran but also on behalf of all deprived and wronged members of the *ummah Muḥammadiyah*. Without surrendering his initial ideological base, Khomeini succeeds in broadening his appeal both historically (to Sunni Islam) and contemporaneously (to non-Iranian dispossessed masses capable of being mobilized against autocratic minority regimes through the agency of "pious persons").

## Conclusion

Islamic fundamentalism is a major new departure in the most recent chapter of Islamic history. Its virulent anger against Western influence, coupled with an appeal to moral integrity and political activism, has been dramatized in the Iranian Revolution, making Khomeini the *bête noire* of popular writers, fundamentalists, the feared closet ghosts of every Islamic society.

We contend, however, that Islamic fundamentalism is neither as monolithic nor as universal as commonly supposed. If one begins to assess the current profile of the Muslim world from Southeast Asia instead of West Asia, i.e., the Nile-to-Oxus region, it becomes quickly evident that other forces are at work in the non-Arab societies of Malaysia and Indonesia. The future of Islam there is tied to local considerations that bear a distant, largely symbolic relationship to the rest of the Muslim world.

Even in West Asia, the historic heartland and contemporary political center of the Muslim world, one finds a plurality of relationships to the past. In Pakistan, as in Indonesia and Malaysia, the trend is toward identification with the distinctive role of local actors and regional movements in the restoration of Islamic fortunes. In Egypt, the stress is on the agency of Egyptians as the foremost representatives of core Islamic values, which are Arab/African/Asian in a descending gradient. In Iran, the hope of both Shariati and Khomeini is for Iranians to implement Islamic principles within the contemporary political sphere in a way and to a degree that Arabs are incapable of doing. For Khomeini it is not the past glory of the early Caliphate or the medieval Safavi state but the putative unity of the neighboring, rival Ottoman state which serves as a clarion cry for the full implementation of Islamic values in and beyond present-day Iran.<sup>50</sup>

In each instance examined, it is orientation to the past that provides the key to understanding present gropings and future directions. Fundamen-

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<sup>50</sup> A crucial provision of the new Iranian Constitution calls upon the government "to make continuous efforts to realize the political, economic and cultural unity of the world of Islam" (*Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Teheran, n.d., Article 12, p. 25).

talists, unlike their traditionalist counterparts, are determined to rekindle the glory of Islam, not by ignoring or retreating from the West, but by confronting, challenging, matching and—in God's time, with His grace—defeating it.

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# SYMBOL, RITUAL, AND COMMUNITY: AN APPROACH TO ISLAM

## Religious Studies in a New Key

Of books, articles and conferences on what scholars of religion do and how they should do it, there is no lack in contemporary academe. The nonconfessional study of religion as a university discipline began in the last decades of the nineteenth century with such figures as Chantepie de la Saussaye at Amsterdam, C. P. Tiele at Leiden, and Max Mueller at London. This tradition, which has shaped our Western notions of the study of world religions, has been known variously as *Religionswissenschaft*, comparative religions, phenomenology of religion, and history of religions, *inter alia*. Despite important differences, what all these labels imply are methods for compiling and comparing religious data and for advancing theories about their general significance. The materials for compiling came largely from the textual, archeological, historical and ethnographic work of historians and anthropologists. The comparisons and theories were drawn from categories supplied by Post-Enlightenment philosophical and theological discourse, as well as prominent notions, such as Rudolph Otto's claim that a *sui generis* experience of "the holy" is demonstrable among human beings, and Emile Durkheim's deduction that dichotomizing between "the sacred" and "the profane" is an elementary form of the religious life. In my view that distinguished tradition of European scholarship on religion, which flourished on American soil at Chicago in this century under such great luminaries as Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade, is coming to an end. The work of compiling textual and ethnographic data and comparing patterns of religious beliefs and behavior according to neo-Hegelian phenomenological schemata no longer corresponds to what North American scholars in the other human sciences are doing, if it ever did. Our conversation partners in the other human sciences have been exploring such methodological approaches as structuralism, post-structuralist deconstruction, cognitive psychology, and semiotic theories of textual and cultural analysis. Moreover, ideologues within academe are voicing strident criticisms of "orientalism" and the concept of the "primitive," upon which so much of history of religions scholarship has been based.

I believe that the determinants of a new phase of scholarship on religion, reflecting the wider academic environment of the human sciences in North America, are being worked out in the some nine hundred



departments of religious studies. Most religious studies faculties share teaching, promotion and tenure responsibilities among scholars who have been trained in two or more of the following areas: (1) the seminary disciplines, namely, theology, church history and biblical studies; (2) area studies fields, primarily East Asian, South Asian and Middle Eastern studies; (3) traditional humanities, especially philosophy, history and literary and art criticism; and (4) social sciences, particularly anthropology, sociology and psychology. If, in theory, method and content, there are too few common denominators to yet constitute religious studies as a discipline, nonetheless informal conversations are taking place among some theologians, textualists and contextualists about such cross-disciplinary concerns as the semiotics of cultural symbolism, ritual processes and the dynamics of tradition and change.

Last summer while I was groping for my own conception of religious studies I received a letter from a friend traveling in India. Commenting on the work of a colleague, he said: "She. . . has the talent and the accumulated accomplishment to move to the frontier of the living and literary traditions of Maharashtra." That strikes me as the kind of thing many of us in religious studies should be doing, and we should be developing curricula which will enable us to train our students how to do it. If our training was in sacred textual traditions, then we must also be able to assess ritual/social responses to those texts. If our training was in constructing taxonomies of social behavior and of cultural artifacts, then we must also relate such structures to the social constructions of reality of those for whom these cultural materials are significant.

Let me attempt to illustrate another concern I have about religious studies, and in particular about the study of Muslim scripture, the Qur'ân, with a passage from Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*:

. . . at no point is there any direct learning of literature itself. Physics is an organized body of knowledge about nature, and a student of it says he is learning about physics, not about nature. Art, like nature, has to be distinguished from the systematic study of it, which is criticism. It is therefore impossible to "learn literature": one learns about it in a certain way, but what one learns, transitively, is the criticism of literature. Similarly, the difficulty often felt in "teaching literature" arises from the fact that it cannot be done: the criticism of literature is all that can be directly taught.<sup>1</sup>

My point is, of course, that what holds for physics, art and literary criticism, holds also for religious studies. All too many of our students and not a few of their teachers assume they are learning or teaching "a religion" in university classrooms. The more cautious may say they are learning or teaching "about" religion. If Frye's point is valid for religious studies, however, our proper task is to learn about the *study* of religion, that is, the task of developing coherent strategies for the interpretation of

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<sup>1</sup>Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 11.

the data of religions and, just as importantly, measuring the coherence and rationality of any interpretation of religion that gains currency in academe, the media, and in the general marketplace of ideas.<sup>2</sup>

“Learning Islam” is, of course, a meaningful phrase, but it belongs to the cultural contexts of Islamic society. It is within indigenous groups that Muslim children and adults, following established ways, inhabit emotional, cognitive and actional worlds shaped by experiences quite different from our own. Within such contexts we find established pedagogical and socio-ritual forms of “teaching the Qur’ān” and “learning the Qur’ān.” Though we may visit Qur’ān schools and university *madrasas*, and even become participant/observers within them, our scholarly discussions must ultimately come to make sense to others who will test the conclusions we draw from our data according to the rules of basic research in the human sciences.

Thus far I have argued two things. First, I believe that some of the more worthwhile achievements of various older, European traditions of theological, biblical, oriental, humanistic and social science studies have converged in the North American religious studies departmental context; it is within that context that scholarship on religions can and should be defined in the 1980s and 1990s, perhaps somewhat independently of our European mentors. Second, religious studies is a critical undertaking. We do not teach religion in the university. Our task is to teach about how to study the data of religions. With these points in mind, let me turn to the topic at hand, the Islamic religion—specifically, the Qur’ān. I shall begin by trying to locate the Qur’ān within a specific Muslim context.

## An Islamic Religious Context

Imagine yourself a part of the following scene. You are disembarking from a train in Tanta, a city of over a million people in the Nile Delta, about an hour-and-a-half ride from Cairo. You leave the station amidst the cacaphonic clamor of insistent vendors, tourist guides, taxi drivers, alms-seekers, and crowds pressing for tickets. As you reach the street you begin to negotiate through the urban concourse of pedestrian, automotive and animal traffic, and soon you gain your first glimpse of what you have come to see, the cathedral mosque of Ahmad al-Badawi—its imposing domes and façade facing you from the other end of a thoroughfare lined with shops and stalls, and filled with people, animals and cars.

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<sup>2</sup>This particular task of religious studies has been reaffirmed convincingly in recent times in Jonathan Z. Smith’s collection of essays, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and in *Take Judaism for Example: Studies Toward the Comparison of Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), esp. Neusner’s preface, pp. 1-6, and J. Z. Smith, “No Need to Travel to the Indies: Judaism and the Study of Religion,” pp. 215-26.

Your purpose is to visit the mosque and shrine of Ahmad the Bedouin, a famous Sufi saint of the Middle Ages. As a scholar, you may want to do one or more of the following things: study and photograph art and architecture; see the tomb of Ahmad the Bedouin and the ritual activities that take place around it; observe the sessions of *kuttab* (Qur'ān schools for children)—or perhaps the *madrasas* for more advanced scholars who delve into texts and commentaries. Or you may wish to focus on the liturgics of Qur'ān recitation, the call to prayer and the sermon delivered by religious functionaries, or witness the *dhikr* ceremonies of mystics, or interview some of the participants on the significance of what they are doing.

In order to get to your destination, however, you must traverse the crowded market that leads to and surrounds the mausoleum/mosque complex. Like the millions of Egyptian Muslims who travel to Tanta each year to receive the blessings of this entombed medieval saint on his *moulid*, the anniversary of his birth, and like the centuries of pilgrims from across North Africa who have stopped in Tanta on their way to perform the *Hajj* in Mecca, you are on your own odyssey—a scholarly one, you remind yourself—and you too become ineluctably enmeshed in a network of what we religionists are wont to call “sacred” and “profane” activities. If your singular intent is to see and hear how the Qur'ān verses are studied and recited, you must first fend off a sea of youthful entrepreneurs who thrust cheap miniatures of the Qur'ān into your pockets and then, not too surprisingly, demand a cash *quid pro quo* known as *bakhshish*. If your purpose is to photograph the sacred mosque, your lens will in all likelihood be cluttered with crowds of people conducting commerce in the *suq*. And if you finally get to the point of entering the mosque, you will become caught in the crush and confusion of Bedouin and peasant women, ululating at the sight of the entombed saint and rushing to circumambulate around him. It may suddenly occur to you that those wonderful paperback texts on Islam, with discrete chapters on the Prophet, the Qur'ān, the Five Pillars, Islamic Law, mysticism, etc., seem to have little to do with your own confrontation with Islam in the flesh. In Tanta, Islam is a huge book with no separate chapters. Your scholarly task of explaining and interpreting Islam in Tanta will require new directions and different strategies.

Those who wish to learn more about Islam are in possession of modest luck. Many respected works are available on the Qur'ān, the fundamentals of Islamic worship, the art and architecture of mosques, and the ethnographic features of Muslim societies. And in increasing numbers, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith likes to remind us,<sup>3</sup> Muslims themselves are providing insiders' interpretations of Islamic religion and culture. What all

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<sup>3</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Comparative Religions: Whither—and Why?” in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, eds. M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 31-58.



of this means, however, is that if you want a more holistic and integrated understanding of the Qur'ān in Islamic cultures, you will have to do some legwork. The works of textualists, art historians, ethnographers, social historians and Muslim interpreters are shelved at different locations in the university library. Courses and seminars on different aspects of Islam may be offered in departments of Near Eastern studies, foreign languages, art history, anthropology, history, political science, religious studies, *inter alia*. The textual, artistic, pedagogic, economic, social and religious aspects of Islam that press in upon you with centripetal force at places like Tanta get separated and broken down under the centrifugal force of scholarly research. It is a problem in want of solutions.

The kind of solution I shall propose is not very original, for I lean heavily, as you will soon discover, on the work of others in anthropology, semiotics and hermeneutics. Nor is my solution, which is aimed specifically at problems in Qur'ānic studies, applicable to all fields and problems in religious studies. Rather, it is my hope that, by groping for solutions to problems in the study of Islamic religion, the variety of concerns we have in religious studies may find greater discursive contiguity, if not disciplinary congruity.

## The Qur'ān in Text and Context

Keeping in mind the environment in which the Qur'ān is situated at Tanta, let us consider the Islamic doctrine of parallel oral and written traditions of transmitting divine speech. Writing recently on this topic, Labib al-Sa'id has said:

While Muslims believe that the canonical written text has been a significant factor in the preservation of the Koran and that no corruption has befallen the text, they believe just as steadfastly that the Koran has been transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth and that the actual recitation of the Koran therefore constitutes an autonomous oral tradition quite independently of written texts.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, there is a saying among Muslim jurists that "it is a grievous mistake to take the written page as your shaykh."<sup>5</sup> This and other common Islamic parlances point up the fact that even among literate Muslims, learning the Qur'ān is a social experience. For that matter, learning prophetic sayings (*ḥadīth*), the fundamentals of sacred law (*fiqh*, *shari'a*) and the other religious sciences belongs to speech-act situations involving teacher and pupil, recitation and memorization, question and response—

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<sup>4</sup>Labib al-Sa'id, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version*, trans. and adapted by B. Weiss, M. Rauf and M. Berger (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1975), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup>al-Sa'id, *Recited Koran*, p. 53.

all within a performance framework that is patterned by literary, oral and behavioral codes.<sup>6</sup>

In Tanta the parallel, yet integrally related, textual and oral traditions of the Qur'ān are very much in evidence. Long before they achieve literacy—and many will never acquire functional literacy in the classical Arabic of the Qur'ān—children learn to memorize and to enunciate Arabic scripture according to one of the several systems for reading the fixed consonantal text. For the nonliterate—and many of the Qur'ān reciters I met and interviewed in rural and urbanized regions of Egypt were nearly so—the capacity of memory and speech to transmit the divine word revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad is of paramount importance. The Prophet himself was regarded as an *ummi*, a term which means “uneducated” and “illiterate,” and thus without access to the sacred texts of other monotheistic traditions. Yet, in the Islamic view of things, it was to this unlettered prophet that the word of God, inscribed from all eternity on a Heavenly Tablet, was orally conveyed by the angel Gabriel, and thus to the Arabs and to all humankind. That cosmic source of oral transmission was historically manifested on specific “occasions” (*asbab*) over the twenty years during which the verses of the Qur'ān were recited by the Prophet in Mecca and Medina. Similarly, the moments when the Qur'ān is recited or quoted by Muslims occur as antiphonal *responsa* to the liturgical and social events of everyday life. The biography of Muḥammad makes the “occasions” of prophetic recitation explicit; they include times when his prophethood and the true God were tauntingly rejected by the Meccan Quraysh, Muslim battlefield experiences at Uhud and Badr, as well as specific religious, familial and political situations at Mecca and Medina. Throughout Islamic history, through traditional Islamic pedagogy, the text has been memorized, and through social patterns of public discourse in local dialects, children have acquired the competence to cite appropriately relevant Qur'ānic phrases in classical Arabic—a social phenomenon one is just as likely to encounter in Indonesia as in Saudi Arabia.<sup>7</sup> Thereby the symbolism of Islamic cosmology becomes ritually and socially reproduced within the Muslim community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>On the problem of oral and written cultures see Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Marilyn R. Waldman, “Primitive Mind/Modern Mind: New Approaches to an Old Problem Applied to Islam,” in *Islam and the History of Religions: Perspectives on the Study of a Religious Tradition*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, forthcoming [1985]).

<sup>7</sup>See Mitsuo Nakamura, “Noble Character and Social Harmony: Themes of the Muḥammadiyah As a Javanese Movement” (paper presented at the University Seminar on Change and Continuity in South and Southeast Asia, Columbia University, April, 1982).

<sup>8</sup>See Dale F. Eickelman, “The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978): 485-516.

Following Derrida I have found it useful to regard the diffusion of Qur'ānic speech in Muslim culture in terms of his concept of "intertext."<sup>9</sup> The oral contextualization of the symbols of revelation within social transactions conducted in dialects of the Persian, Indonesian, Urdu, Berber or Arabic languages, is a symbolic reflex on the Prophet's miracle in Arabia. In that sacred moment from which Muslims for fourteen centuries have drawn inspiration for the shape and conduct of their corporate and private lives, Muḥammad recited the inimitable Qur'ānic cadences to Arab audiences whose greatest cultural achievements lay in poetical and oratorical skills—competing and persuading through the rule-bound formulae of verbal art forms. Qur'ān and tradition proclaim the inability of Arab orators to match Qur'ānic eloquence. The power of the Qur'ān to move and persuade, and the incredulity among Muslims that anyone could not be persuaded by the Qur'ān, belongs to the speech-act situation which the Qur'ān has occupied within Muslim culture. Understanding the Qur'ān involves an intertextual network that extends to the sacred literary biographies, collections of prophetic sayings, annals of Muslim history, and manuals of Islamic law. The intertext also includes the oral transmission of these interrelated texts, the popular stories about them, and verbal references to them in everyday speech. Islamic values and ways of seeing and doing things are linked to the Qur'ān in a network of symbolism; the Qur'ān generates a vast intertext imprinted on the fabric of Muslim society.

## In Search of a New Approach

Islamicists have viewed the Qur'ān primarily as a sacred literary document, a scripture. German, French, American and British scholarship on the Qur'ān have tackled the problems of the Near Eastern origins of Qur'ānic terms and themes, the formation of the text, the process of canonization, literary criticism, and the literary history of classical commentaries on the text. What I learned of the Qur'ān in graduate school and was prepared to teach my students in religious studies came from that tradition of rigorous literary and historical criticism. As I made the career transformation from doctoral training in area studies to teaching in religious studies, I continued to stress textual matters for two or three years at both the university and the American Academy of Religion. Eventually, however, my thinking became contaminated by other approaches and fields of religious studies. Indeed, I first came to regard Islamic studies in a new light as a result of a faculty colloquium on Navajo prayers.

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<sup>9</sup>On Derrida and "intertext," see Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), esp. pp. 87-163.



A colleague, Sam Gill, was working on his book, *Sacred Words*, a study of Navajo prayer texts.<sup>10</sup> Gill was attempting to reinterpret the massive ethnographic and missionary collections of Navajo prayers. The work of compiling, sorting into genres and comparing types had already been done; Gill was devising a way to locate the Navajo significance of prayers in relation to what he termed the mythological, ritual and motivating situations in which the prayers were performed in Navajo culture. He started with the premise that prayers are intelligible speech acts among Navajos, and he sought to clarify the mental, affective and social aspects of Navajo culture which would shed light on how the formulaic phrases and semantic locutions of Navajo prayers are understood in various kinds of situations.

The transition from seeing what Gill was doing with Navajo prayers to seeing how it might apply to my own analysis of the speech-act nature of the Qur'ān in Islamic culture was slow and met with many problems. The apparent similarities between the performance of prayers in a primarily nonliterate culture and the pedagogical and liturgical role of scripture in a dual oral and literate culture were not isomorphic. The Qur'ān, after all, is a text which educated Muslims have studied for fourteen centuries with the help of authoritative commentaries and according to accepted rules of exegesis. The textual quality of the Qur'ān is fervently recognized by nonliterate pastoral, peasant, and urban poor among Muslims, who together constitute the majority of the population in most Islamic regions. Illiteracy is no proper impediment to owning a Qur'ān or following strict rules of purity for touching and handling a Qur'ān. Even the nonliterate peasant knows that the sacred law which governs his life is based on a book which he cannot read but to which he has oral and liturgical access. At the level of cosmology he knows that the Qur'ān was recorded on a Heavenly Tablet; in the sacred time of the Rashidun, the immediate successors of Muḥammad, and thereafter, the divinely revealed text was recorded by specially trained calligraphers. The great majority of Muslims, whose only access to the Qur'ān is oral, also presume its textual authority in the Heavens and in their world of everyday experiences.

Developing a theoretical framework for analyzing the Islamic significance of the written and oral text of the Qur'ān begins by recognizing the symbolic ritual and cultural spaces the Qur'ān occupies. Such a task requires the insights of both textualists and contextualists, historians working with Islamic literary documents and social scientists working in local Islamic societies. A few decades ago, Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield and Islamic historian Gustav von Grünebaum recognized the possibility that their separate approaches to Islam were complementary, and thus they framed the problem in terms of the social and cultural dichotomous relationships between great and little traditions. In Redfield's

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<sup>10</sup>Sam D. Gill, *Sacred Words: A Study of Navajo Religion and Prayer* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

well-known work on peasant societies, the matter is presented thus: ". . . von Gruenebaum, historian and humanist, is studying from the top the same phenomena which Westermarck, anthropologist, studies. . . from the bottom—in local communities."<sup>11</sup>

The historian of religions, however, when faced with these two approaches directed toward one another by the textualist and the contextualist, runs the risk of scholarly schizophrenia. According to the anthropologist and the historian, you still must choose between textual and social analyses as the points from which you will view other aspects of the Qur'ān in Islamic culture. What the historian of religions wants in this situation is to find a middle ground, a focal point of textual and contextual studies, as the most productive space to occupy. Do methodologies exist which will facilitate analysis of the cultural interstices of textual and social phenomena?

A useful approach is that of Clifford Geertz, who views religion as a cultural *system* of symbols which relate and mutually reinforce a society's mental "world view" and its social "ethos." World view refers to "the picture [a people has] of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order." Ethos refers to "the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and artistic mood. . . ." For Geertz, "religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other."<sup>12</sup>

Where does this get us in our desire to understand Qur'ānic symbolization in Islamic contexts such as the one in Tanta? It gets us part of the way, for we now realize that Qur'ānic studies will have to include focus on life situations, such as the *madrasas* and Qur'ān schools for children, for these are among the social contexts in which Islamic world views are inculcated. Normative attitudes toward religious duties, kinship patterns, transfer of women and property, social governance, and human obedience to the divine will are socially reproduced in the pedagogical and ritual transactions of the mosque, home and marketplace. This world view corresponds to a way of life, an ethos, that may be seen in various identifiable relations discerned among men and women, parents and children, buyers and sellers, teachers and pupils, pious and impious, learned and illiterate, Muslims and Coptic Christians, and natives and foreigners, in the social mix of Tanta. That the Egyptians of Tanta (the vast majority of whom are Muslims) live this way is to them a self-evident

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<sup>11</sup>Robert Redfield, "The Social Organization of Tradition," in *Peasant Society: A Reader*, ed. J. Potter, et al. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 27; the complementarity of Redfield and von Grünebaum's views can be seen in their separate opening essays in *Unity and Variety in Islam*, ed. G. von Grünebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

<sup>12</sup>Clifford Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," reprinted in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 89-90.

ratification of the truth of the Qur'ānic and prophetic paradigms they take as prescriptions for their way of life. And this way of life is molded and nuanced by the symbolic and formulaic Qur'ānic phrases and prophetic *exempla*—cited, alluded to, and imitated in all facets of life one sees, not only inside the mosque itself, but outside it on the streets, in the market and in the home. Indeed, the texture of human life and activity in Tanta, everywhere one observes it, is punctuated with double quotation marks around Qur'ānic expressions and single quotes around Qur'ānic paraphrases and allusions.<sup>13</sup> No Muslim would claim that Islamic society in Tanta or anywhere else perfectly conforms to the divine will of Allah, nor should we uncritically idealize our descriptions of Islamic society. It is rather that the tension between the way Muslims conceive things ought to be, and the way they perceive them to be in reality, is resolved in cognitive, emotive and performative patterns that resonate with Qur'ānic symbolism.<sup>14</sup>

But still, as historians of religions, we have chosen to examine the data differently. We want to know how, in more general human terms, the textual and contextual bases of Qur'ānic symbolism interact for Muslims. "World view" and "ethos" are analytical categories devised by social scientists; such categories are useful for social descriptions and analyses but not sufficient for the marshalling of all aspects of religious data, which also include texts and textuality. Our problem is to find a way to be able to juxtapose and measure the relationships between text and context in instances of Islamic pedagogy, ritual performance and social experience. Put differently, scholars such as Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner have identified two kinds of phenomena for analyses—two dependent variables—namely world view and ethos. With respect to Islam, I suggest that this kind of analysis requires an independent variable—a factor which will account at least in part for the existence of and changes in the dependent variables of world view and ethos. For Geertz such a hypothesis seems to turn on Ernst Cassirer's and Kenneth Burke's notion of symbolization and symbolic acts. We still want to know, however, what generates the specific Islamic character of peoples as different as Indonesians and Moroccans—the question Geertz grappled with so eloquently in *Islam Observed*. Therefore, I propose to examine an additional category, an independent variable for analysis of Islamic cultures, namely, "cosmology." I have come to the conclusion that the intertextual qualities of the Qur'ān in Islamic cultures are comprehended in the symbolic interplay of *cosmology*, *world view* and *ethos*. Analysis of cosmology adds an important dimension to the dis-

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<sup>13</sup>See Clifford Geertz, "Art As a Cultural System," *Modern Language Notes* 93 (1976): 1473-99; and Moshe Piamenta, *Islam in Everyday Arabic Speech* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979).

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Map Is Not Territory," in *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in History of Religions*, ed. J. Z. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 289-309.



cussion, namely, analysis of basic meaningful units into which the message of the Qur'ān can be divided, and analyses of the formulaic structures and repetitions of the written/oral Arabic text. The place to start, then, is with the semantic and formulaic features of the Qur'ān, textually fixed and culturally transmitted by literary and oral traditions, to which Islamic representations of reality are variously tied in each historical, geographical and social situation in which Muslims have found themselves. What does "cosmology" mean in this kind of analysis?<sup>15</sup>

## **Qur'ānic Cosmology**

After a brief invocation in the first sura or chapter of the Qur'ān, known as *al-Fatiha* [the Opener], the second sura begins with the following verses:

This is the book;  
 In it is a guidance sure, without doubt,  
 To those who fear God;  
 Who believe in the Unseen,  
 Are steadfast in prayer,  
 And spend out of what We  
 Have provided for them;  
 And who believe in the Revelation  
 Sent to you,  
 And sent before your time;  
 And (in their hearts)  
 Have assurance of the Hereafter.  
 They are on true guidance from their Lord,  
 And it is [they] who will prosper.  
 As to those who reject Faith  
 It is the same to them  
 Whether you warn them,  
 Or do not warn them;  
 They will not believe.  
 God has set a seal  
 On their hearts and on their hearing.  
 And on their eyes is a veil;  
 Great is the penalty they (incur). [Qur'ān 2:2-7]

In Qur'ānic cosmology, the divine message is addressed to prophets, and through prophets, to specific communities of humankind. In the passage just quoted the Prophet Muḥammad is meant. "We" refers to the divine majestic first person, "You" to the Prophet, and "They" to

<sup>15</sup>I have written about Qur'ānic cosmology in "Understanding the Qur'ān in Text and Context," *History of Religions* 21/4 (1982): 361-84; and "Clifford Geertz Observed: Understanding Islam As Cultural Symbolism," in *Anthropology and the Study of Religion*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Robert Moore (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, forthcoming [1984]).

humankind, who fall into two categories—those who accept the message and fear God, and those who reject it and turn from God and His messengers. Many prophets were sent and many communities received the revelation. Those who rejected God and His messengers were destroyed, a sign of divine retribution. Belief in the “Unseen” refers to the heavenly realm, including God and His angels, among whom are the disobedient ones, of whom Iblis is preeminent but followed also by Satans. Iblis and Satans may exert influence in the “seen” or phenomenal world, as destructors who encourage humankind to reject God and His messengers.

The cosmology of the text consists then in two realms, the mundane and the supramundane. The actors are God, angels, satans, jinns and humans, and the most basic actions include sending signs or other communications (such as laws, consolations and instructions), and accepting or rejecting the divine communication. The semantic range of the Qur’ān is restricted to a limited number of actors and actions even at the surface level of the text. These textual operations or “semantic constituents” as Gill refers to them, lie beneath the surface of the text. In the passage just quoted, the following sequence of kinds of semantic constituents can be discerned upon analysis:

- Divine guidance (through prophets) to humankind
- Human response of acceptance
- Divine assurance
- Divine reward of human acceptance
- Human response of rejection
- Divine cloture
- Divine punishment of human rejection

Analyzed in these terms, the Qur’ānic text reveals a specifically Islamic, patterned texture to the cosmos. Other types of semantic constituents, of course, occur throughout the text and in varying repeated patterns. The actual number of types of constituents at this level of analysis is nonetheless limited. Charting and tracking the cosmic drama of supramundane and mundane interaction and their timeless consequences, at the level of the subtext, can be encoded with alpha-numeric designations. With this type of textual analysis we begin to see repetitions of certain workings of the cosmic structure throughout the scriptural text, and enunciated repeatedly in Muslim culture through pedagogical and liturgical oral recitation and through representations in art (especially calligraphy) and architecture.

The historian of religions has something to contribute to the ethnographers’ analyses of world view, which Dale Eickelman defines as “shared cultural assumptions concerning the nature of the social world.”<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup>Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 175.

historian of religions also has a perspective on how the textual materials used by historians function in the social reproductions of Islamic world views. Constituent analysis evinces an independent variable, a cosmological code, which is constant among the cognitive, affective and behavioral dependent variables of Islamic civilization. The symbolism of the cosmological sequences of the written/oral text expands throughout the intertextual body of interpretive literature. Qur'ānic commentaries, prophetic sayings, and sacred biographies of the Prophet and his Companions situate the basic Qur'ānic symbolism in the *Heilsgeschichte* of 7th-century Arabia. Other, more popular folk genres, such as the legends of the prophets, locate the Arabian focus in relation to the prophet-lore of Near Eastern monotheism. Legal discourse translates the sacred symbolism of Qur'ān and prophetic *exempla* into normative prescriptions for the conduct of human affairs.

Thus, the Qur'ānic cultural intertext establishes a network of symbolism that includes the personal pronouns of cosmic entities—the “We,” “You,” and “They” of God, Prophet and humankind in the sacred history and literature of the Prophet and his times, and in the actual circumstances of Muslims living in places like Tanta. Oral and popular speech-act situations, as when religious leaders deliver sermons at the Friday congregational prayer, or when the men of a village or neighborhood gather to discuss religion and politics, are occasions when human life and sacred texts fall within semantic and symbolic, and thus cognitive and affective range of one another.

## Religious Studies and Contemporary Islam

In closing I shall try to bring my topic to bear on those discussed by Professors Fazlur Rahman and Bruce Lawrence in this series of lectures. How can analyses of Qur'ānic cosmology and the cultural symbolism of the world views it generates help us to understand expressions of Islamic modernism, traditionalism, and fundamentalism? Or, to frame the question in terms of discipline: What would be a religious studies approach to an explanation and interpretation of events in contemporary Islamic history? One cannot, of course, in concluding an unscientific postscript, adequately essay the methodological complexities of analyzing Qur'ānic symbolism in the recent developments of Islamic social and political history; Professor Lawrence is convincing on the folly of seeking general and universally valid explanations that ignore historical, geographical and cultural differentiations among the Muslims of Southeast, South and West Asia. Still, it is worth asking whether the concerns that define religious studies are germane to the problems discussed by social scientists and historians, some of whom at least have ventured to interpret contemporary events, and in doing so find they must deal with religion. Historians of religion, trained primarily in the humanities, too seldom like to leave the more stable atmosphere of classical history and texts.



Two matters deserve mention in regard to possible religious studies approaches to modern Islam. The first is the problem of determining the independent and dependent variables of Islam (tradition) in the flux of history (change), including contemporary history. If Islam (in whatever sense one takes the term) is not the constant factor of analysis—any more than modern reified notions of Christianity or Buddhism are—then what is? Clearly, it is to the empirical evidences of religion that the religious studies scholar must apply interpretive strategies. Such a scholar may properly note Professor Rahman's (and other Muslims') claim that the Qur'ān and Sunna are the sole criteria by which Islam in (modern) history is to be judged. The evidences of the mental and social activities of Muslims interpreting the Qur'ān and Sunna, however, constitute important data fields for religious studies scholarship. Yet, the Qur'ān and Sunna are in fact the general cultural spaces in which to look for independent variables in relation to the dependent variables of historical, geographical and cultural expressions of Islam; the scholar must nonetheless at some point analyze these textual and oral/performative materials beneath the surface of religious discourse and behavior. Qur'ān and Sunna are textual and performative materials (speech-act situations) at the heart of Islamic experiences of life. Contemporary scholarship in semiotics has undertaken to analyze such phenomena, even if individual scholars do not always agree on methods or results. Religious studies scholarship has important concerns with contemporary Islam.

The question to be raised concerning Professor Lawrence's essay is whether traditional and fundamentalist "orientation to the past" is a sufficiently independent variable of analysis to explain the "experiential convergence" of the more contingent variables implicit in his five vectors of analysis. I would want to argue, without ignoring his brilliant discussion of the significant historical and cultural differences among Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran and Egypt, that orientation to the past is orientation to a set of symbols, however differently these have been and are interpreted in the Muslim world. It is the religious phenomenon of being oriented to a set of symbols—what I have discussed as cosmology, mentally interpreted as sacred history and socially reproduced in profane history—that begs for explanation, at least in religious studies scholarship.

The second matter of importance to religious studies scholarship seems to challenge the absolute integrity of the first, namely, what are the cross-cultural implications for the study of Islam? How are historians of *religion* especially to analyze modernist, traditionalist or fundamentalist Muslim world views and social ethos if Muslims reject *a priori* all but their own understandings of Islam?

In this regard, Professor Rahman's constructive dialogue with Western scholarship has been productive. Rahman, however, challenges the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer, who premise human understanding on the inescapable historicity of interpreting subjects. Rahman, as philosopher, does not accept the New Hermeneutic, but rather prefers to

presume the possibility of direct objective knowledge of intended meanings of other (past) authors' texts and acts through historical reconstruction.<sup>17</sup> In this sense he would presumably locate an independent variable in Qur'ān and Sunna, to which he believes all humans have the same cognitive access. Yet it is precisely because horizons of understanding differ among Muslims, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, that Rahman must belabor points of interpretation that seem to him reasonable if not self-evident. Truth strategies may work with absolute predictability in the circuits of computers; not so in culturally based reasoning, which flows unevenly through changing cultural contingencies.

Thus, I am willing to concede that a semiotic analysis of Qur'ānic textual and performative symbolism as the independent variable of Islam in social history will not go down well with most Muslims or indeed with a good many Western scholars, which is not, as such, a sufficient reason not to pursue what I am doing or to discuss it with other scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim. In the Muslim world, it has made a difference when I have discussed the cosmology/world view/ethos strategy in Qur'ānic studies whether my interlocutor was an Indonesian Muslim formally trained only in a village *pesantren* (indigenous religious school), a traditional Qur'ānic scholar at al-Azhar University in Egypt, or an American-educated Pakistani lawyer in Karachi. Not only was I quite aware that their backgrounds on the subject (horizons of understanding) were quite different from mine and from each other, but that this implied that their conceptions of what I was trying to do, and why, were quite different from my own conception of the proper mode and purpose of scholarship.

Professor Lawrence is quite right to stress, by placing first among his vectors of analysis, "the radical disjuncture between the Western/American experience of religion and that of the worldwide Muslim community."<sup>18</sup> That disjuncture poses a procedural problem in religious studies scholarship and must be considered more seriously in this discipline than perhaps in other disciplines that consider Islam and other religions. Given the widespread attention Muslims are now paying to Western perceptions of Islam, religious studies scholars must appreciate the fact that cross-cultural studies are a two-edged sword. Consider, for example, the growing number of books and journal articles appearing in the Muslim world on how to go about "Islamizing" banking, economics, government-controlled education systems and, most interestingly, the social sciences. The Western scholar confronts world views that are alien to accepted notions of banking, pedagogy and social science research, for

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<sup>17</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 8-11.

<sup>18</sup>See Bruce B. Lawrence, "The Fundamentalist Response to Islam's Decline: A View From the Asian Periphery," 1983 Paine Lectures in Religion, first page of second lecture.

example. These differences of view in scholarship seem all the more incorrigible insofar as the discussion has come up in the Muslim world in the first place in large part as a response to the West. Yet, Western epistemologies in these fields, however exportable they have been since colonial times, are facing stiff competition in the foreign markets they once dominated. And we are beginning to have to deal with the marketability of Islamic cultural exports to our own culture.

It is precisely with this point that the most ironic problem for religious studies today arises, especially in relation to Islam. As I indicated in the introduction to this essay, the development of *Religionswissenschaft* and phenomenology in the late nineteenth century were characterized by the general post-Enlightenment concern to separate knowledge from belief. Those engaged in religious studies sought credentials in the secular university in a time in which theology was not only dethroned but forced to maintain a separate identity. Hence, religious studies came to see itself not as a "discipline" for true believers, but *about* them.

Modern Islamic scholarship has not abandoned theology or discounted true belief as a credential for sound scholarship. Indeed, as much of the discussion about Islamization and "Islamic" banking, education and social science show, the traditional (and Qur'anic) welding of reason (*'aql*) and faith (*iman*) is still very much a necessary premise among the Muslim intelligentsia.

Many Muslims, while recognizing and deploring the postmodern Judeo-Christian separation of reason and faith, also suspect orientalism and Western religious studies of being surreptitiously "religious." Other Muslims quite naturally regard the separation of reason and faith as a theological and thus a basic intellectual mistake, the evidence for which they see in Western materialism and moral decadence. The irony of religious studies scholarship's attempting to internationalize, then, is that while Western scholars occupy a world view that seeks positive truth through skepticism and the questioning of all beliefs and opinions not supported by empirical and coherent evidence, Muslim scholars tend to view the quest for knowledge without guidance from shared religious beliefs as dangerous, leading to serious error. Therein lies one of the least corrigible dilemmas of cross-cultural studies of religion.

Are Muslims simply wrong to see traces of the "religious" in the intentions and agendas of Western religious studies scholars? Perhaps not. Commenting on Western understandings of religion and the problem of modernization for religion today, Mary Douglas observes: "The most exalted definition starts with subjective experience of the sacred. This follows a prestigious line of Lutheran theology leading to studies in phenomenology."<sup>19</sup> Many scholars in religious studies would be embarrassed by this observation, which assaults their objectivity. Thus, the

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<sup>19</sup>Mary Douglas, "The Effects of Modernization on Religious Change," *Daedalus*, 111/1, (1982): p. 6.



difficulty of cross-cultural studies lies not only in trying to understand other cultural world views, but also in understanding one's own, and in discerning how others perceive one's own—all of which is necessary to a productive global environment of research.

I have attempted to make sense of an approach to Qur'ānic studies which is revisionist but nonetheless finds some justification in semiotics and speech-act theory. I have ended by admitting that cross-cultural agreement on the productivity of this and other research strategies in religious studies are fraught with difficulties in the international environment in which we now publish. Along with the other contributors to this series of lectures, I hope that my essay, in some small way, will set the stage for further discussion of these issues, even if my own approach does not find ultimate acceptance, east or west.

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